It Is Your Responsibility to Save the World: The Influence of Neoliberal Ideology on the Portrayal of Agency and Responsibility in Young Adult Dystopias

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Reader, She Saved the World: How YA Speculative Fiction Uses 19th Century Literature to Explore Genre

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Introduction

Over the past fifty years, Young Adult literature has become a genre that is impossible to ignore. With hundreds of titles being published each year in the English language alone, the YA genre challenges scholars to rethink the boundaries between children's and adult literature. YA is a genre that lives in the liminal space between children's literature and adult literature and is therefore hard to define. Most commonly, it is defined by its audience: a YA book is written for the young adults the genre is named after, usually having a young adult as its protagonist as well. However, this definition provides no intrinsic criteria for the genre. By focusing only on the perceived audience, this definition overlooks the content of the novels. It assigns characteristics to the genre based on assumptions about its audience instead of textual evidence. Several scholars have therefore attempted to find a more usable definition of the YA genre in the past thirty years. Their findings will serve me as handholds for my further discussion and analysis of the YA genre.

In his 2016 speech "Young Adult Literature: The State of a Restless Art," literary scholar Michael Cart describes YA literature as a "restless art". Considering the dynamism of YA literature, I want to outline a tentative profile of the genre based on its most common characteristics as observed in my three case studies. These case studies are *Black Spring* by Alison Croggon, *Heartstone* by Elle Katharine White and *Brightly Burning* by Alexa Donne. All three novels were published in the last ten years and belong to the YA and the speculative fiction genres, as well as being adaptations of 19th century classics. By comparing the three case studies to each other and to the texts that they were inspired by, I will examine which story conventions can be identified across the texts. The unique story worlds of the novels are used to highlight these conventions, which reveals their importance to the YA genre as a whole. To define and analyse the story conventions that I identify in the case studies, I draw on research done by scholars in the field of YA literature and adaptation theory. In the following sections,

I will give a brief introduction to these two fields and the research with which I undertake a dialogue in this thesis.

1. Young Adult Literature

The simplest way to define Young Adult (YA) literature is, as said, 'literature written for young adults'. In his study *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism,* Michael Cart notes that the term YA includes texts "for readers as young as ten … and as old as twenty-five" (140). However, not every definition of YA is limited to the age range of its audience. For example, Cart also differentiates YA literature from adult literature by claiming that YA texts are "simply enjoyable to read" (Cart x). I can attest that the three YA novels that I discuss in this thesis are enjoyable texts to read. Moreover, beyond being enjoyable, YA novels are powerful, an opinion that Cart communicates in his extensive work on the history and trends of the genre.

When defining YA literature in her work *Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Conventions, Originality, Reproducibility,* literary scholar Kim Wilkins refers to the genre's protagonists. She claims that "YA is recognisable as YA because its narratives are focalised overwhelmingly through teenage protagonists" (Wilkins 7). I concur that picking up any YA novel will usually present you with a protagonist no older than twenty. Wilkins also analyses aspects such as word length, price point, distribution methods and marketing, stating that "[g]enre is formed in the complex interrelations between text, audience, and industry" (8). Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I am unable to take all of these aspects into account. Instead, I focus on basic stylistic conventions, as well as the characters and fabula[1] of the novels.

YA literature has a unique liminal character since it centres the transition from childhood to adulthood. The genre is characterised by a unique relationship between authors and readers, since YA authors are usually adults writing for children. In their paper "Stylistics

[1] Per the field of narratology, the fabula of a text is "a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors" (Bal 5)

and children's literature," Michael Burke and Karen Coats posit that adult authors address their younger audience "with a goal to impart knowledge and represent the ways the creators feel the world does or perhaps should work" (5). Coats expands on this in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Children's and Young Adult Literature,* asserting that adults establish an ideology of childhood in the children's books they write (49). Thus, these texts should be read as a reflection of how adult authors see childhood, rather than the reflection of the actual experience of childhood.

Literary scholar Antero Garcia, in his study *Critical Foundations of Young Adult Literature: Challenging Genres*, agrees with Coats, declaring that "the language, the actions, and depictions of normalcy within [YA] novels all exert force on me, guiding me to understand what youth behavior looks like and what are normal feelings" (6). Garcia cautions that this representation of normalcy is based on the experience of wealthy white American teenagers and that the genre, by depicting Western culture, "defines and reinforces these [cultural] practices over time" (5). This is the risk with any cultural product: since no work of art is made in a vacuum, it inevitably reiterates existing structures.

Coats addresses what she calls the "morally didactic impulse" (1128) of children's literature, claiming that "the purpose of children's and YA books has become more human-focused, aimed at creating racial, class, and global awareness and facilitating social critique" (1128). She explains that YA novels in particular encourage empathy in young readers by allowing them to imagine the lives of the disempowered (Coats 263). According to her, "YA texts are more likely than children's books to explicitly problematize issues of embodiment, considering weight, ability, and the visibility of racial difference in light of dominant cultural narratives" (Coats 199-200). To this I would add YA literature's tendency to centre gender as well, as I identify in my three case studies. Coats identifies messages such as "kindness, cooperation, overcoming selfishness, and taking responsibility for one's actions" (613) as being

extensively present in YA texts. Cart also acknowledges the moral lessons provided through YA books, stating that YA literature "invites us to reexamine our understanding of the human condition and to expand our moral sensibility" (102). Garcia agrees and expands on this by claiming that YA novels "speak to the greater human condition, and not just to the specific teen experience" (xiv). The latter aspect is related to the liminal zone dividing adulthood and childhood in YA novels. YA novels not only introduce a young audience to the concerns of adulthood, but connect their readers to their own teenage experiences by foregrounding themes such as empowerment and social responsibility.

2. Speculative Young Adult Literature

The three case studies I analyse in this thesis are part of a subgenre of YA literature: speculative fiction. In the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, Marek Oziewicz defines speculative fiction as "all non-mimetic genres—genres that in one way or another depart from imitating consensus reality—from fantasy, science fiction, and horror to their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres" (2). Coats provides a similar definition of fantasy literature: for her, a key trope of fantasy fiction is "a departure from consensus reality" (1172). Authors face the challenge of anchoring their story world in the real world and then expanding their reader's understanding of that real world through the departures from reality in the fantasy world (Coats 1184-5). In this thesis, I categorise both fantasy and science fiction as speculative fiction. Because of the similarity between Oziewicz's and Coats' definitions of speculative fiction and fantasy respectively, I generally find Coats' research of fantasy literature applicable to science fiction as well. Coats describes fantasy texts as a place for children to develop and expand their awareness of the grey area between binary oppositions as well as to express "pressing existential concerns for which they may not yet have words, or which would be too difficult to express in a straightforward way" (1200-1). While addressing these concerns, YA texts have "carved out a special role for young people … as those who can succeed and prosper when

adults fail" (Coats 125). As evidenced by my case studies, young protagonists often take the reins when they feel that adults have failed.

Wilkins notes that fantasy novels function through a "complex system of imagined lore, which encompasses (and is afforded and limited by) the fantasy world's history, culture, and logic" (49). She speaks extensively about fantasy fiction in her study *Young Adult Fantasy Fiction: Conventions, Originality, Reproducibility.* According to her, YA fantasy "brings together two established genres with devoted readerships … and in so doing amplifies and energises some of the most recognisable aspects of these two genres" (Wilkins 3). This thesis focuses on the way that the speculative genre aspect of the case studies reveals and amplifies what I identify as core aspects of YA fiction. Wilkins' research focuses on YA fantasy novels that take their inspiration from Western medieval times. Consequently, her findings are not always applicable for the case studies I discuss in this thesis, since these take place in worlds inspired by 19th century Great Britain or, in the case of Donne's *Brightly Burning,* in the future.

Wilkins provides an entry point into a further discussion of the relationship between YA fiction and speculative fiction by identifying a pattern in the narrative shape of YA fantasy novels: "an extended middle made up of small servings of dramatic interest (defeating escalating supernatural and/or violent threats), often on the way to facing a larger, defining supernatural and/or violent threat" (23). This pattern appears in my case studies as well. She also discusses the protagonists of YA fantasy novels, who are often "exceptional females [who] compete and win within and against oppressive institutions" (Wilkins 22). According to Wilkins, "[r]esistance to institutions on an epic scale – nations or worlds – is a mainstay of fantasy fiction that sees full expression in [YA fantasy]" (25). These two aspects are also identifiable in science fiction novels and, I argue, a mainstay of speculative fiction as a whole.

Coats also notes the disruption of oppressive structures in YA novels, but she links this aspect to dystopian novels in particular (50). Dystopian novels, which often take place in the

future, are part of the speculative fiction genre and thus relevant in a discussion of the genre. Cart discusses dystopian YA novels in his research as well, quoting scholar Janie Slater who assigns four aspects to them. According to her, dystopia:

1. Provides a healthy outlet for exploring socially unacceptable topics within our own spheres and communities.
2. Helps us see new, different perspectives than we're capable of from our own limited experience.
3. Helps us sort out and express feelings and emotions, providing cathartic release and relief.
4. Inspires us with often courageous, defiant (in a healthy way), quirky and unique protagonists who overcome barriers and limitations. (Cart 125)

Like the defiance of existing oppressive structures mentioned by Wilkins and Coats, Slater's aspects are found throughout YA speculative fiction as a whole. Nevertheless, Cart identifies fantasy's "implicit invitation to escape this careworn world for a visit to a more appealing one, if only in one's imagination" (98-9) as its main draw. He goes as far as to declare that young adults are "inherently reality-denying" (Cart 32). Considering the overarching presence of oppressive systems and grave ethical dilemmas found in YA speculative fiction, I contest both of his claims. It is difficult to deny reality by stepping into a world that mirrors your own and reframes its problems. Instead, I join Coats by acknowledging Tamora Pierce, who describes fantasy as being "a literature of possibilities" (Coats 1202) with an emphasis on the possibility of creating "a world in which the disenfranchised are empowered" (1202).

3. Adaptation Theory

For my use of adaptation theory, I draw on Linda Hutcheon's influential study *A Theory of Adaptation*. Her definition of an adaptation consists of three parts: "[a]n acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; a creative and an interpretive act of

appropriation/salvaging; an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (Hutcheon 8). All three of these criteria can be applied to the retellings I discuss in this thesis. The importance of my engagement with this field of study is emphasised by Hutcheon's understanding that adaptations are "inherently double- or multilaminated works" (6). My case studies not only exist within the history of YA novels, but are also a part of the history of the novels they are based on.

The amount of adaptations in circulation attests to the popularity of the genre. Hutcheon explores the reasons why audiences enjoy adaptations. According to her, the enjoyability stems from "[r]epetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (Hutcheon 4). The repetition of a familiar story inspires an expanded comprehension of the original as well as a comfortable feeling of knowing what to expect (Hutcheon 114). Additionally, she theorises there may be a certain type of story that comforts people and is thus retold continuously (Hutcheon 115).

Adaptation theory focuses on adaptations across different media. Most of its debates focus on texts adapted to film or theatre, for example, and because of this adaptations where the medium remains the same are investigated less often (Hutcheon 34). Nevertheless, Hutcheon maintains that these adaptations also involve "a conceptual flipping back and forth between the work we know and the work we are experiencing" (139). She stipulates that this is only the case for an audience who is aware that they are engaging with an adaptation and are familiar with the original text (Hutcheon 139). This is also why scholars involved in analysing adaptations usually create comparative studies (Hutcheon 6).

Hutcheon asserts that worldbuilding has become an increasingly popular topic within adaptation studies (xxiv). Changes in the story world are particularly present in adaptations that involve a change of genre, such as my case studies. In adaptation theory, it is assumed that the story is the common denominator in a text and its adaptation (Hutcheon 10). Hutcheon points

out that what remains the same in an adaptation "can be as revealing as significant differences" (xvi). This is why I compare the adaptations to the texts they are based on and investigate what aspects of the story transfer smoothly to their new rendition. By doing so, I can identify what story aspects are considered attractive for the readers of YA speculative fiction. Hutcheon notes that themes in particular are often easily identifiable across texts (10), but characters and fabula may also be transposed (11). When analysing my case studies, I pay particular attention to these three aspects.

In adaptations of longer novels, there is often a contraction of the story. Hutcheon explains that "there will always be both gains and losses" (16) and connects this to the intended audience of an adaptation. She explains that "[t]o appeal to a global market or even a very particular one, [an adaptation] may have to alter the cultural, regional, or historical specifics of the text being adapted" (Hutcheon 30). These shifts change the interpretation of a story by its audience. Furthermore, in adapting a text, adapters also take a position on the text (Hutcheon 92). They can express a rejection of the aesthetic or political values in the text and use the adaptation to "engage in a larger social or cultural critique" (Hutcheon 94). Hutcheon indicates that transcultural adaptations often address race and gender politics and declares that a shift of time period can make an adaptation transcultural (147). With regards to my case studies, the difference between contemporary and 19th century culture is vast enough to consider the adaptations transcultural, and this time gap indeed leads to the expected social critique. Since YA speculative fiction usually involves a critique of existing oppressive structures, the tendency of adaptations to do the same thing magnifies that critique. This similarity may also factor into why the YA speculative fiction authors of my case studies created adaptations.

4. Reputation

To finish my introduction, I would like to discuss a common denominator between YA literature, speculative fiction and adaptation studies: these fields all have a history of being

undervalued in academia. Garcia notes that YA "has too often been marginalized and even demonized" (xi). Cart also expresses his view that "a certain sense of stigma about being published as YA lingers, at least in the United States" (136). There is an assumed lack of depth in YA literature that leads to the genre being dismissed in academic circles. However, this is unjustified. In his study on the YA genre, Cart identifies "richness of character, an attribute that, more than any other, separates literary from popular fiction, in which character often takes a back seat to plot" (Cart 85) in YA works published over several decades.

Among the critics of YA fiction, Cart notices a further devaluation of the speculative genre. He remarks that "established gatekeepers have generally failed to recognize [YA fantasy]" (Cart 98) despite the sub-genre's popularity. He suggests that this is because YA critics have a "narrow focus on realistic fiction" (Cart 98). This is exemplified by his own historical account, in which the overall focus remains on realistic fiction. Coats acknowledges the low reputation of YA speculative fiction as well, asserting that the genre is often belittled (256). She challenges this low reputation by pointing out that fantasy and imagination are influential factors during the development of a child's brain, making YA speculative fiction provides a unique tool for teenagers to develop their understanding of the world (Coats 188). Wilkins claims that YA fantasy is "the dominant expression of fantasy fiction in this century" (7). This claim confirms the value of my examination of the influence of YA speculative fiction within the YA genre.

Adaptations also struggle with a bad reputation. Hutcheon observes "constant critical denigration of the general phenomenon of adaptation" (xiii-iv). She indicates that critics believe adaptations are derivative and secondary to the texts they are based on (Hutcheon xv). Despite this, the authors of my case studies use YA speculative fiction and adaptation to create unique, powerful pieces of social critique and commentary on adolescence.

5. Final Notes

At the end of this introduction, there are a few last remarks that I would like to make regarding this thesis. Firstly, I insist that the goal of this thesis is not to offer a *definitive* definition of YA literature. Instead, I identify story conventions that present a recognisable pattern within the genre. Garcia observes that when doing research into YA, scholars often use the popular novels of the genre as case studies (17). Looking at novels that are less popular or belong to a niche, such as the retellings discussed in this thesis, can reveal further nuances in the YA genre. Because of the variation that exists within the genre, Marah Gubar believes that we should give up trying to define the YA genre at all. She declares that "insisting that children's literature is a genre characterized by recurrent traits is damaging to the field, obscuring rather than advancing our knowledge of this richly heterogeneous group of texts" (Gubar 210). However, research has shown distinct patterns that are worth investigating, despite the extent of the variation within the genre. Investigating which aspects of YA novels can be found in various corners of the genre will help me uncover the core of the genre.

Considering the limited scope of this research, there must be YA novels that contradict my findings. Nevertheless, the presence of my findings across several case studies emphasises the value of this research. Speaking in general terms about a genre that is as heterogeneous as YA literature entails the risk of overgeneralization. I am not attempting to definitively define the genre, but rather to gain a further understanding of its most common characteristics.

What follows are three chapters that discuss the case studies in eight sections: an introduction, a discussion of narration, style, characters, fabula, genre and theme, and a conclusion. Chapter 1 discusses *Black Spring* by Alison Croggon, Chapter 2 discusses *Heartstone* by Elle Katharine White, and Chapter 3 discusses *Brightly Burning* by Alexa Donne. After these three chapters, I conclude by discussing my findings in a general conclusion.

Chapter 1: *Black Spring* by Alison Croggon

1. Introduction

In 2013, Australian author Alison Croggon published her novel *Black Spring*. On her website, the novel is classified as a dark romance. The YA genre is not mentioned; however, the novel was shortlisted for the Ethel Turner Prize for Young People's Literature at the 2014 NSW Premier's Literary Awards and considered a Notable Book by the Children's Books Council of Australia in 2014. The description of Croggon's novel on her website starts as follows: "Inspired by the gothic classic *Wuthering Heights*, this stunning new fantasy is a fiercely romantic tale of betrayal and vengeance" ("Fantasy"). This opening points the potential reader to the key parts of the text that Croggon has produced: *Wuthering Heights,* here classified as a Gothic classic, and mixed with the genres of fantasy and romance. A quick summary of the novel is necessary before starting my analysis:

Hammel leaves the city to move to the Northern Plateau in search of peace, but instead he finds an intriguing tale. Hammel's housekeeper Anna tells him the story of Lina Kadar, who was born into a conflict between wizards and royalty as a daughter with lineage in both groups. As she grows up, it becomes clear that Lina is a witch. The only person who understands her is her foster brother Damek. Sadly, the death of her father leaves Lina an orphan and the king instates a cruel guardian called Masko to take care of her and Damek. Damek leaves so that he can gain the power to protect Lina from Masko. During his absence, Lina goes to a wizard to suppress her magic and she marries a kind, regular man. When Damek returns, he destabilises her peaceful life. Lina lives long enough to birth a healthy daughter and defy a wizard who despises her, before dying and leaving her daughter in the hands of Damek, who cannot forgive Lina for her marriage and death. In Hammel's time, Lina's daughter is married to Damek and abused by him. Hammel leaves for a time and when he comes back, it is revealed that Damek has died and Lina's daughter is now free.

In this chapter I explore the way that Croggon's novel repeats but does not replicate Brontë's novel and how her rewriting fits into the YA genre. In the following sections I do this by looking at the narration, style, characters, fabula and genre conventions respectively.

2. Narration

To investigate the narration in my case studies, I engage with narratology as discussed by Mieke Bal in her key work *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* Bal provides an extensive framework for analyses of all aspects of narratology, of which her theory on narrators and focalizers is especially useful for my research. Both *Wuthering Heights* and *Black Spring* consist of a reproduction of a series of events, told by several narrators and presented through the vision of several focalizers. Croggon's novel is divided into five parts, including the epilogue, whereas *Wuthering Heights* consists of two volumes, which were originally published in combination with a volume of *Agnes Grey*. In both books, all the narrators are character-bound: every narrator is also a person who is present during the events that are described (Bal 22). In *Black Spring*, the first narrator who is introduced is Hammel, who describes his stay in the village of Elbasa in a journal. Throughout the book, his role as narrator, focalizer and character is almost identical to Brontë's Lockwood. Both Hammel and Lockwood are witnesses: they are present as characters in the stories that they are recounting, but they are not active participants in the events. According to Mieke Bal, a witness is a type of narrator who "stands apart, observes the events, and relates the story according to its point of view" (28). In the case of Hammel and Lockwood, their position as a witness is initially motivated by their ignorance with regards to the history surrounding the people they meet and interact with. Their role is to introduce the reader to the other characters. However, even after Hammel and Lockwood know the whole story, told to them by the embedded second narrator of their respective works, they do not become a part of the narrative. They merely offer a frame for the tale.

Croggon's second narrator Anna parallels Brontë's Nelly Dean. As servants of the house, they have both been involved in the lives of the main actors since their birth. However, they are positioned differently from one another. Nelly describes herself as a "cool spectator" (Brontë 173). This is a generous description, since she openly discusses her feelings towards the people she is talking about. For example, when Heathcliff has disappointed her, she describes him as "the black villain" (Brontë 119), explaining that "[she] detested him just then" (Brontë 119-20). Nevertheless, Nelly's self-profiling as a normal bystander has a rhetorical purpose: it allows her to relay her outrageous tale objectively and truthfully. However, Nelly is not objective. Her feelings towards Heathcliff and the others make her a prejudiced narrator. Nelly sees, hears and passes judgement on the events as they are happening, but she is unable to affect any change. It is inevitable that the events of the novel will play out based on the actions of the main actors.

Croggon's Anna has a more intimate relationship with her charge Lina than Nelly does with Catherine. At several points in the book, she refers to Lina as her sister. Her narrative is biased in Lina's favour. However, Croggon preserves a measure of distance between Anna and Lina. Anna describes her child-self as "a most ordinary child, with no precocious abilities" (Croggon 66). Furthermore, Anna moves away from the North for several years. During this time, she "hear[s] only the small scraps rumor [feed] [her]" (Croggon 147). Anna's status as a servant distances her from the events in *Black Spring's* fabula. While she is by Lina's side, Anna relies on her own intuition. For example, she states that she "cannot know the truth of another's heart" (Croggon 269) but also relates that she is "sure Lina knew of [Damek's] plan [to ruin Masko], as she never protested his leaving the house and always waved him off with a smile which held an edge of malice" (Croggon 192), reading knowledge and approval into Lina's quiet smiles.

Since Anna and Nelly are presenting a narrative to someone who has no previous knowledge about anyone involved, it would be easy for them to lie or hide certain aspects of the events. However, Nelly claims to be a neutral observer of facts and profiles herself as too forthright to lie, and Anna claims that any inconsistencies in her narrative are the result of the fallibility of memory. She muses: "[i]t's difficult to remember things precisely. All this happened so long ago, and when I reflect, it seems to me that I have forgotten many important things, while others which perhaps seem trivial stand out vividly from the shadows" (Croggon 66). Anna and Nelly are similar narrators, but the differences between their lives and personalities creates a clear distinction between their narratives.

Contrary to *Wuthering Heights*, in which Catherine gets only a very brief opportunity to speak for herself when Lockwood finds a few lines of her diary, *Black Spring* includes several chapters narrated and focalized by Lina. Like Brontë, Croggon chooses to do this through a diary, which has been found by Anna and is read aloud by her to Hammel (118). These chapters describe the years during which Anna was away from Elbasa, shedding a light on the events that led to Lina's eventual marriage to her husband. Through her diary, the reader gets to know Lina beyond the way she is perceived by Anna. Since the image of her offered by her own diary is similar to that presented by Anna, it is confirmed that Anna's depiction of Lina rings true. Moreover, Lina's diary implements a narrator who is not a witness: Lina is involved in the events of the fabula and has a direct effect on them. However, as in *Wuthering Heights*, Lina is unable to ward off her death or the abuse that her daughter suffers afterwards.

3. Style

The YA genre has a large variety of stylistic differences in its novels. However, Kim Wilkins finds that YA novels are generally shorter than adult texts, but are printed in a larger font, resulting in a page number comparable to that of adult novels (6). When comparing Croggon's novel to the Penguin English Library edition of *Wuthering Heights* published in 2012, *Black*

Spring is printed in the same size font, but has larger margins. *Black Spring* has a total of 281 pages, in contrast with *Wuthering Heights*'s 360 pages.

Black Spring prefers dialogue and action over description. For example, when Hammel meets his landlord, Croggon writes: "[a] powerfully built, black-browned man in shirtsleeves, clearly a servant, was standing above me, regarding me with no great friendship in his face" (18). This description is short and to the point. Brontë, on the other hand, writes of Lockwood's corresponding experience: "[h]e little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name" (3). This language use, featuring long, trailing sentences with many commas and em-dashes, as well as extensive descriptions, is typical to *Wuthering Height*'s mid-nineteenth century time of publication. There is also irony in this description: Heathcliff being standoffish makes Lockwood like him more. Hammel does not feel this way about Damek and is instead put off by his demeanour. However, Croggon uses irony at different moments. For example, she writes "[y]ou can imagine how I congratulated myself on having found such an oasis of civilization in this rude country; with what relief I lay down that night between fresh linen sheets; and how, before I drifted off into well-earned slumber, I turned my mind with a fresh excitement to the prospects of my new situation" (Croggon 13). Croggon's style approaches Brontë's historical language closely and sentences such as this could be mistaken for Brontë's 19th century writing. However, Croggon's preference for action distinguishes her general style from Brontë's.

Brontë and Croggon use their descriptions and vocabulary to establish their own distinct tone. *Wuthering Heights* and *Black Spring* both take place in a moor-rich environment, isolated from the rest of the country through distance and, in *Black Spring'*s case, a distinct culture that

differs greatly from the culture in the rest of the country, marking the Northerners as 'other'.[2] Brontë's descriptions focus on the eerie nature of Wuthering Heights, as well as the isolation that people experience in that area. Wuthering Heights is pictured as an inhospitable environment; a type of purgatory. Brontë writes that "the whole hill-back was one billowy, white ocean; the swells and falls not indicating corresponding rises and depressions in the ground — many pits, at least, were filled to a level; and entire ranges of mounds, the refuse of the quarries, blotted from the chart which my yesterday's walk left pictured in my mind" (33). In this snowscape, even the guide poles have been covered, disorienting Lockwood to the point where he would have gotten lost without a guide (Brontë 33). Lockwood states that "time stagnates here" (Brontë 30), which further establishes the area as an isolated, dreary landscape existing outside of time.

In *Black Spring*, the descriptions of the Northern Plateau focus on violence. Hammel's first impression of the place is overwhelming. Croggon writes that:

> it was my first sight of the magnificent heights of the Black Mountains, which hitherto had been but a shadow on my horizon, cloaked in legend. The sheer brute fact of them was awe-inspiring: their crags heaved up into the distant sky, their crowns shrouded with gray cloud, their grim sides falling with an obdurate, oddly graceless beauty down to the Northern Plateau, the Land of Death, which now stretched before me, gray and flat under a thin sprinkling of snow. (7)

Hammel associates the Northern Plateau with the stories he has heard about the violence that takes place there. As he crosses it, he notes that he "began to feel that [he] was traveling through a single vast cemetery" (Croggon 11). Its inhabitants are also aware of the violence. The Northern Plateau is not purgatory: it is hell, as expressed by Damek, who describes "[t]hose

[2] This concept is first introduced by Edward Said in his key study *Orientalism* and has been widely adopted by the academic community.

mountains there, ugly as sin, and these barren plains, and a climate straight from hell" (Croggon 193). Brontë's Wuthering Heights is one where normal life cannot reach and private tragedies such as that of the Earnshaw family take place. Croggon's Elbasa, on the other hand, is a key element in a violent political and cultural conflict. The difference between the settings explains why the tone of the two novels is similar yet different.

4. Characters

Both *Wuthering Heights* and *Black Spring* are heavily character-focused novels. In *Wuthering Heights*, the events in the lives of the young protagonists transform them from selfish, traumatised children into selfish, traumatised adults. The progression feels not only natural, but also predetermined. Croggon's characters participate in a fabula that is very similar to Brontë's. The fate of Croggon's characters is more dependent on the choices they make. They are offered choices that affect their lives and eventual deaths and take ownership of the paths they choose.

The character central to *Black Spring* is, undoubtedly, Lina Kadar. Not only is she the main focus of Anna's narrative, which takes up most of the novel, but she is also at the centre of a political struggle between two parties. Lina is not a chosen one who is prophesied to save the world, such as one might expect in a YA fantasy novel. However, she is in an extraordinary position: she is a taboo mix of the royal house and the wizarding clans. This makes Lina a powerful witch in a land where witches are executed, as well as a wealthy noble who is set to inherit a large estate. Because of her unique position, her birth is not looked upon favourably by anyone and Lina is presented as a character who starts their life at a disadvantage. People think that Lina is "born evil" (Croggon 44), although Anna contests this. She is of the opinion that "Lina was as innocent as any baby is when it first opens its eyes on the world, and there was a spark within her that remained innocent until the last" (Croggon 39). Lina is isolated by her experiences and her lack of loved ones after her father's death (Croggon 154). Brontë's Catherine spends her earliest years with both her mother and her father, but Lina is not afforded

that luxury. The early death of one's parents and general lack of parental figures has been acknowledged as a characteristic of YA, in which young protagonists often have to fend for themselves (Garcia 66). This pattern appears in two of my case studies and relates to the level of responsibility that is placed on young protagonists in YA novels.[3]

Lina grows into a girl with a strong sense of justice, shaped by the cultural ritual of vendetta on the Northern Plateau. Vendetta is a system where, once a murder takes place, it is the duty of the victim's family to pay a hefty Blood Tax to the royal house and avenge the victim by murdering their killer or the killer's nearest male relation. This cycle continues until there are no male relations left. Lina believes in justice based on 'an eye for an eye', for example asking Anna to break her finger after she has accidentally broken Anna's (Croggon 43). When Lina is made aware that her father manipulated the vendetta system to elicit more Blood Tax money, she is abhorred and attempts to reject everything she's ever gained from the money (Croggon 139). Lina's strong moral principles make her more relatable than Brontë's Catherine, who is described as not exactly amoral, but "[seeming] to allow herself such wide latitude, that [Nelly] had little faith in her principles, and still less sympathy for her feelings" (Brontë 115).

Both Lina and Catherine long for freedom. Catherine wants to exist outside of society: when she is sick and rambling, she speaks of wanting to be "a girl again, half-savage and hardy, and free" (Brontë 134). Lina also attempts to find freedom with Damek, Croggon's counterpart to Heathcliff, on the moors, but cannot retain that freedom when the king assigns Masko as her guardian (Croggon 98). She attempts to adapt to her situation instead by letting the wizard Ezra repress her magic and marrying Tibor, a stable, well-off man who is respected in their community (Croggon 162). Lina is an outsider, a common characterisation of YA characters. According to Antero Garcia, young people "empathize with these fictitious characters …

[3] I explore this characteristic further in my following chapters.

through recognizing their teenage emotions related to disconnection" (59). This disconnection is often related to socioeconomic standing (Garcia 59). In Lina's case, this is partially true: her status as nobility does set her apart from commoners and servants such as Anna. However, it is mostly her social position as a mix of a witch and a royal which determines her status as an outsider. Lina's attempt to fit in is relatable for a teenage audience. Catherine feels separated from the people around her as well, but the reason for this is that she believes Heathcliff and herself are better than the people around her. Although this makes her an outsider, Catherine does not struggle with this notion the way YA protagonists do. Instead, she enjoys it.

Readers get to learn more about Lina than they do about Catherine, since Croggon fits in several chapters that are taken directly from Lina's diary. For example, we learn that Lina considers suicide when she feels wounded in her pride (Croggon 121). Lina longs for justice, but she is convinced that she has no power. For most of her life, she does not believe that she is a witch with magical powers (Croggon 122). Lina also does not think money can provide any power (Croggon 130) and, unlike Catherine, she does not see any prospects in becoming a wife (Croggon 135). Lina chooses to accept that she is powerless and marries Tibor, but her defiance is shaken back up when Damek returns. Lina cares deeply about agency and power, a concern that drives a rift between her and Damek when he starts making demands on her. In the end, the quality that gives Lina her powers is her defiance: when she refuses to be treated like a prize to be won by Damek and Tibor and when she refuses to be cowed by the wizard who means to kill her, her true magical power is unleashed and briefly allows her to be as powerful as she had always dreamed of being (Croggon 241). This moment represents Lina's self-discovery and, arguably, her transition into adulthood. Wilkins notes that, in YA novels, self-discovery is often life-threatening (20). This is the case for Lina, who finds her sense of self right before she dies. She realises the extent of her magical powers, but immediately succumbs to the dangers of wielding such power.

Lina's only true wish has been to exist outside of the laws imposed upon her by the royal house, the wizarding clans, her gender and the common people's traditions. Catherine wants to be loved and live selfishly; Lina, for her part, wants to be free. Catherine is born into a stable household and loses her stability over the years, starting with the death of her mother. Lina, on the other hand, has the odds stacked against her from the moment she is born. She is a product of her circumstances who rebels against the systems in place and perishes in the effort.

Damek is also an important character throughout the book. Like Lina, Damek is an outsider and, true to Garcia's view of disconnection as a defining characteristic of protagonists in YA literature, his socioeconomic status plays a significant part in his marginal position. He is introduced as Damek il Haran, alleged to be a bastard of the king himself (Croggon 57). This gives Damek an advantage that Heathcliff, who was picked up off the streets of Liverpool by Mr Earnshaw (Brontë 39), never had. Damek is protected, since he was sent to the Northern Plateau by the king, and he takes advantage of that protection to establish his position beside Lina. However, his power is in fact limited: when the king sends Masko to be Lina's guardian, Damek cannot fight this decision and he leaves Elbasa in pursuit of more power so he can protect Lina from Masko. Coats states that YA, both in its realist and its speculative works, usually features characters who come to perceive and understand the systems they are being oppressed by and "emerg[e] out of confusion about what matters into a firm sense of identity" (263). Damek experiences such a moment once he realises that he is powerless to protect Lina from Masko in the current system. However, according to Coats, YA characters come to realise, as they mature, that they are complicit in these systems and are unable to shed them entirely (263). Damek does not reach this second realisation: he remains firm in his rejection of the system as a whole, all the while moving within it and using his privileges as a wealthy man of royal blood to pursue what he wants. Similarly, Lina does not gain any understanding of her

own complicity in the systems that are holding her back, despite her express rebellion against them when she kills Ezra. *Black Spring* shows the variation that is possible within the YA genre. Although Coats' assessment of YA characters is grounded in her research, it does not apply to this particular speculative retelling and reminds critics that attempting to define the YA genre must account for variation.

Damek is not content to love Lina and be loved by her. Instead, he seeks ownership over her. He states that "[he]'ll not be cheated by anyone, not even Lina" (Croggon 193). When thwarted, Damek is single-minded in the pursuit of his revenge. Anna recalls how he has no trouble "putting aside immediate gratification if he needed to, but the thought of relinquishing the passions that drove him never entered his head" (Croggon 186). He is cruel in his revenge on Masko, who has mistreated him, and shows no pity or mercy. Even Lina, whom he claims to love more than anything, must abide by his rules or reap the consequences. Since Lina cares most about her own agency and power, Damek obstructing her turns him into an antagonist in her eyes. Despite his being loved by Lina, he is far from a typical YA love interest, who supports the hero as they change the world (Garcia 23).

Nevertheless, Damek is not merely an obsessive villain: there is kindness in him too, which is shown through his relationship with Anna. Whereas the relationship between Heathcliff and Nelly remains shallow throughout *Wuthering Heights*, Damek and Anna form a bond. He comforts her when she is upset (Croggon 105) and retains his attachment to Anna even when she thinks of him as a black-hearted villain. Since he has received almost no love in his life, it is understandable that Anna, who renounces his behaviour but does not treat him badly, is special to him. Damek tells Anna: "[y]ou have the right to judge me, which I give no one else. You have a heart, and you have eyes to see. They are precious rare in this world, Anna, and you mind what I say, because I know" (Croggon 255). Anna is the only person in Damek's life whom he trusts to judge him fairly. Since Anna is the focalizer throughout most

of *Black Spring* and the reader identifies with her, Damek's appreciation for her makes him more likeable to the reader, adding a layer of character complexity to his character. This added character complexity is one of the conventions that occurs across YA texts.

Anna is the third notable character in *Black Spring*. As servant of the Kadars and friend to Lina and Damek, most of her life is lived in relation to them. Anna's main role in the novel is to contrast the extraordinary Lina: like Brontë's Nelly in *Wuthering Heights*, Anna is our representation of normality. However, she is also presented as separate from the rest of her class. She explains that "[a]lthough I can't say I have suffered from it, I have always been a little outside things. I was fated, it seems, to be between: neither northern nor southern, neither an illiterate servant nor a noble" (Croggon 67). Anna is another outsider: although she is grateful for her unique opportunities, she recognises that her position keeps her at a distance from those around her. Nevertheless, Anna has more relationships with the people around her than Nelly does. For example, her mother is present throughout the book. Anna also has a husband whom she marries for love and she speaks about how they fell in love and their inability to conceive (Croggon 260). Nelly, on the other hand, rarely mentions her own thoughts and feelings, unless they have direct bearing on the events that she is relating to Lockwood.

Anna's role is different from Nelly's because of a notable absence in *Black Spring*: that of Hindley, Catherine's brother. Catherine is able to grow up closely with her sibling, until the arrival of Heathcliff, but Lina is brought up as Anna's "milk sister" (Croggon 40) after the death of her mother during her birth. According to Anna, "there was a closeness between [them] that was often less of servant and mistress and more like a kind of cousinship" (Croggon 40). Moreover, Anna explicitly states that she "loved Lina as [she] would have loved a sister" (Croggon 154) When Damek comes into their lives, Anna feels the jealousy that, in Brontë's original, drove a rift between Hindley and Catherine (Croggon 65). However, Anna's love for Lian never wavers. Since Hindley is also Catherine's guardian, he is able to abuse her from

that position. Similarly, Lina is abused by her guardian Masko, who, unlike Brontë's Hindley, is not related to her by blood. Anna's bond with Lina remains intact. Their intimacy is so strong that when Masko wants to punish Lina, he sends Anna away from Elbasa for seven years. To prevent this, Lina lowers herself "so far as to beg him to let [Anna] stay" (Croggon 117), which is something she does not do again. When Lina is married to her husband Tibor seven years later, she convinces Masko to let Anna return and she welcomes Anna back with the wish that Lina can be "a better friend" (Croggon 153) to her. Even when Lina kills the wizard, Anna "[feels], if anything, more loyal to [her] mistress" (Croggon 243) and after her death Anna remembers her as "[her] sister, [her] other soul" (Croggon 269). This is different from how Nelly and Catherine relate to one another: Catherine often angrily puts Nelly in her place as a servant and Nelly confesses to Lockwood that she "did not like [Catherine], after her infancy was past; and I vexed her frequently by trying to bring down her arrogance; she never took an aversion to me, though" (Brontë 70). Catherine retains her closeness with Nelly because there is no one else she can turn to when Heathcliff is gone; Lina, by contrast, chooses Anna to be her friend because of her affectionate feelings towards her.

Anna's character is more complex and rounded than Nelly's. Coats describes round characters as "demonstrating multiple traits and facets" (657). In her adaptation, Croggon pays attention to her female characters and explores their perspectives. Hutcheon states that "[adaptations] are just as likely to want to contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted text as to pay homage" (20). *Black Spring* reads as a homage to the text that inspired it, but also challenges the 19th century politics that it represents, especially with regards to gender. Other than Catherine, Brontë's characters are a one-dimensional representation of womanhood. Croggon's women are more varied. Despite this comparative complexity, however, Croggon's characters are not very dynamic: according to Coats, a dynamic character "appear[s] to undergo an arc of development that leads from a state of innocence or immaturity to a state of greater

knowledge or maturity" (657). With the exception of Lina, who dies right after her moment of defiance, the characters remain set in their ways. According to Coats, a character's growth makes it easier to identify with for young readers (657) and such growth is therefore a likely choice for YA characters. However, the absence of this element, barring the one exception, does not make *Black Spring* less effective or enjoyable as a narrative: YA evidently has room for these stories as well, which reiterates that genre conventions serve as a guideline rather than a set of hard rules.

5. Fabula

The fabula of *Black Spring* is very similar to that of its original. Nevertheless, it is not identical. The difference lies in the details. For example, Heathcliff leaves Catherine without a word, whereas Damek communicates clearly to Lina that he is leaving to gain the power to protect her and tells her to wait for him (Croggon 141). Other important differences are that *Black Spring* include a subplot in which Lina's life is in danger from outside forces, as well as the fact that Lina, Damek and Anna spend a large part of their childhood away from the North instead of staying in Elbasa their entire lives. These two details in particular make the events of the fabula less isolated than they were in *Wuthering Heights*, where the events were confined to the private family sphere. Lina's existence has ramifications beyond her role as daughter, foster sister and wife: her existence is odd and controversial in a country-wide context and affects the world to the point that a political figure such as the wizard Ezra wants to kill her.

Furthermore, Croggon merges several of Brontë's characters, as with Anna being a sibling to Lina in lieu of Hindley. One way to consider this change is as a case of "narrative redundancy giving way to narrative pertinence" (Hutcheon 36), which is considered a possible reason for this type of condensation in adaptations. The functions of Brontë's characters are more important than their separate existences, so Croggon can merge characters without losing their value. In the story that Croggon tells, Hindley is unnecessary: Masko's villainy as well as

Anna's complicated role as both servant and sister fulfil the same function as Hindley's characters.

Another departure from the fabula of *Wuthering Heights* is the removal of the plot surrounding Catherine's Linton Jr. and Hareton. Damek has no son to marry Lina's daughter to. Instead, he forces her to marry himself and, when he dies, she does not remarry anyone but moves back in with Anna as sole heir to the estate. The ending of *Black Spring* does not centre around a marriage, but instead around a young girl released from the relationships that limited her. At the end of the text, Lina Jr. is damaged, but she has a real chance of shedding the power struggle between the wizards and the royal house and the history between Damek and Lina. Moreover, she is released into the care of Anna and her husband, who love her. Catherine Jr. and Hareton also enjoy a hopeful ending with their prospective marriage and the money they are both set to inherit. Hopeful endings such as these have been connected to YA literature in contrast with adult literature. When speaking of dystopian literature for young people, Michael Cart quotes children's novelist Moira Young, who states: "These are dark, sometimes bleak stories, but that doesn't mean they are hopeless. Those of us who write for young people are reluctant to leave our readers without hope. It wouldn't be right. We always leave a candle burning in the darkness" (Young qtd. in Cart 125). This assessment holds for *Black Spring* and can thus be extended to include other subgenres of fantasy fiction for young people and, perhaps, to YA literature as a whole.[4]

6. Genre

My thesis focuses on how my case studies fit into and subvert genre. In his analysis of another YA novel, Garcia mentions four aspects that are, according to him, "boilerplate YA" (23). These aspects are: "a protagonist that feels out of place, a protagonist with special powers, a giant, globe-threatening villain [and] a heterosexual love interest" (Garcia 23). *Black Spring*

[4] I will return to this argument in my later chapters.

does not contain the third of these components, and the presence of the other three components is questionable as well. Lina has special powers, but she is not a clear-cut protagonist. However, Anna frames her as the most important character, so considering her the protagonist is possible. Lina being the protagonist implies that Damek is the heterosexual love interest. Nevertheless, Damek's role in the story is that of a villain as much as a relation to Lina. Combined with Lina's ambiguous status as the protagonist, Garcia's aspects do not neatly apply to *Black Spring*.

The novel is also part of the historical fiction genre. *Wuthering Heights* was a contemporary novel when it was published. *Black Spring*, on the other hand, is historical fiction. This historical aspect affects more than just the writing style, which is similar for the two novels. According to Wilkins, "[h]istorical settings allow young adult characters to drive the narrative with more agency, and to do so from a less safe social position, because they are not cocooned by family" (16-7). Wilkins' research focuses on fantasy novels set in Medieval times, so her observations cannot uncritically be applied to novels set in different time periods. In the case of *Black Spring*, however, the protagonists indeed become part of the adult world at a young age. This is particularly true of Damek, who sets off on his own, while Lina remains in the power of her guardian Masko until she marries.

During the time when Brontë wrote and published her novel, the concept of the adolescent had not yet been introduced. It follows that Croggon's adaptation for young adults may not neatly fit into the YA genre as described by Garcia, Coats and Wilkins. This is presumably a deliberate choice: Croggon could have easily strayed further from the original and followed the conventions listed above. However, she did not have to. In YA, there is space for many types of stories. In this regard, the fact that YA's main characteristic is the age of its protagonists and target audience makes the genre flexible.

Wuthering Heights is a novel that has defied classification as well. Generally, it is placed in the Gothic tradition of nineteenth-century British literature. It has the reputation of having subverted that genre in various ways. Donna K. Reed establishes that *Wuthering Heights* "has been primarily examined as a female version of the Gothic romance" (209). Emily Rena-Dozier finds that one of the ways Brontë does this is by including both a Gothic and a domestic narrative in *Wuthering Heights*. Rena-Dozier describes how *Wuthering Heights* "carefully breaks down [the] opposition between gothic and domestic modes by illustrating the ways in which the domestic is predicated on acts of violence" (760). Daniel Cottom goes as far as to say that the novel "rewrites the Gothic" (1068). Amy Almeida broadly defines the Gothic genre as "[presenting] the reader with a reality which does not coincide with traditional social and moral norms" (52). The novels within this genre, she claims, typically include "sentiments of naturalism, wildness, boldness, yearning, wonder, mystery, sensualism, supernaturalism, sadism and Satanism" (Almeida 52). Almeida indicates the presence of a supernatural element in particular as one of the Gothic novel's most distinct features (52). *Wuthering Heights*, with its wild landscapes, intensely emotional relationships, violence between people, a large number of references to demonic forces and the, albeit ambiguous, presence of a supernatural element, fits into this description of the Gothic genre. However, the aspects of the novel as described as Reed and Rena-Dozier complicate its status as a Gothic novel.

In Gothic as well as in YA fantasy, supernatural elements are a key aspect of the genre. *Wuthering Heights* walks the line between realism and the speculative by playing on the Gothic trope of the presence of ghosts. Brontë presents these scenes ambiguously. Lockwood encounters Catherine's ghost in the middle of the night after a vivid nightmare. He believes Wuthering Heights is haunted, but as soon as he calms down he rejects this thought (Brontë 28). The novel's later allusions to ghostly appearances on the moors are eerie, but they are based only on hearsay. Brontë refuses to establish whether the supernatural elements of her

novel are truly a fact of the world or merely a figment or her characters' imagination. Croggon's world has more decidedly supernatural aspects.

According to Garcia, "YA thrives in placing its readers in a world that is unfamiliar from their own" (64). This partially explains the popularity of speculative fiction in the genre. Hutcheon writes that world building is the most important factor in contemporary adaptations. She describes the fictional world as the story world of the text (Hutcheon xxiv). The concept of the story world in the context of YA literature is further explored by Wilkins. She explains how "fantasy stories 'lay our scene' within a complex system of imagined lore, which encompasses (and is afforded and limited by) the fantasy world's history, culture, and logic" (Wilkins 49) and that "[s]etting and lore combined make up the 'storyworld' of fantasy fiction" (Wilkins 50). Croggon expands Brontë's story world in her adaptation and creates an entirely new setting.

Croggon's story world is extensive. It features male wizards who uphold the law with an iron fist, as well as female witches who are killed at birth. Wizardry is not only an established aspect of the world, but also vital to its political and social structures. Magic in Croggon's world is both respected and distrusted. Although political figures as well as well-off citizens freely make use of wizards' services, wizardry is viewed negatively on the whole (Croggon 5). In rural areas, wizardry is wielded as an instrument for governing the people. Anna explains that "the wizards, who enforce the Lore, and the kings, who take the Blood Tax, are the two chief powers in the Black Country, and it might be said that they have many interests in common; however, in practice each keeps to its own" (Croggon 41). The royal house and the wizards of the North are stuck in a political stalemate. Although the royals have the law, the wizards have their own rules, and both parties hold power over the common people. They choose to coexist instead of annihilating each other. However, they do so reluctantly. This is

why, in the North, the royal house is viewed as too removed from their society to have any real power and, in the South, wizardry is reduced to a service instead of a governing tool.

The magic system itself is not clearly defined. Although all characters in the novel are aware that magic can be used to achieve great feats, there are no explicit limitations as to what these feats are. This ambiguity with regards to the limitations of magic allows Croggon more flexibility in navigating the concept of verisimilitude, defined by Coats as "the maintenance of an illusion of truth in a work through consistency *within* the world the author has constructed rather than consistency *between* the real world and the world of the text" (1112). The lack of established limitations to magic means most things will not be questioned. This is in line with the findings of Wilkins, who explains that "[t]he complexity of a storyworld is often hinted at rather than laid out explicitly" (52). In *Black Spring*, wizards can burn people alive without setting a fire (Croggon 73); trace the killer of a murder victim when there are no usable clues on the scene (Croggon 92) and forcibly suppress the powers of other users of magic (Croggon 158). These things are done by practising wizards with years of experience, such as the wizard Ezra. However, the wizards are not the only ones in possession of magic.

Lina comes from a long line of wizards and has the striking purple eyes that identify her as a witch. Since her status as a witch is the source of much unrest between the wizarding clans and the royal family of the kingdom, she remains untrained throughout the novel, and her powers are repressed by the wizard Ezra for an extended period of time (Croggon 158). However, her witchcraft manifests itself in several ways. Lina's general power is intrinsically linked to her magic. According to Anna, "Lina's entitlement was a kind of enchantment in itself, persuading others to see her as she saw herself" (Croggon 49). Lina possesses a powerful charisma that allows her to win people over. Anna believes Lina's magic creates her ability to influence people; and Anna is not the only one. Damek states that he "live[s] under a curse, and she is the witch that has cursed [him]" (Croggon 203), and Lina's husband Tibor relates

that “[his] mother says she has bewitched [him]” (Croggon 221). Anna truly recognises Lina as a witch when, at a young age, Lina curses Masko, despite the fact that she will be well into adulthood by the time the curse comes to fruition (Croggon 116). Lina has minor skills in comparison to the abilities of the full-fledged wizards.

Lina enjoys her most powerful magical moment as an adult, when she is nearing her tragic end: after giving birth to her daughter and breaking through the suppression of her magical powers, she is officially declared a witch by the wizard clans and sentenced to death. Ezra enters into Lina’s house to carry out the verdict, but in a show of powerful magic, Lina overcomes Ezra and kills him. Anna describes how “a viciously bright light seemed to emanate from [Lina’s] form, banishing all shadows” (Croggon 240) and how “[h]er hair was coiling about her face like a nest of snakes, and her eyes were violet fire” (Croggon 240-1). The description of the murder is impressive in its own right, but becomes even more poignant by Ezra’s reactions throughout the ordeal. Anna states how “[h]is attitude was one of complete terror” (Croggon 241). Since Croggon has previously established Ezra as a powerful magician and a viable threat, going so far as to have him suppress Lina’s own magical powers for several years, the fact that he is completely overcome by her in his last moments serves to emphasise how powerful Lina is.

Despite the explicit nature of the speculative elements in Croggon’s adaptation, she follows Brontë in her ambiguity as to the existence of ghosts. Like Lockwood, Hammel has a strange experience during the night he spends at the Heights, during which he allegedly encounters the ghost of Lina. Contrary to Lockwood, who retains no physical injuries, Hammel is left with a bleeding hand (Croggon 30-2). This lends a certain validity to his experience that Lockwood lacks. However, Hammel soon starts wondering whether he did not merely “[hallucinate] her in a fever” (Croggon 36). However, Anna is convinced that he has really seen the spirit of Lina. Anna describes that in the past “[s]ometimes I even saw her, a slight

form standing under the cypress outside, or vanishing from a room" (Croggon 258) and that "[a servant] claimed that she saw [Lina] in the bedroom where she died, as clear as day, and Tibor came downstairs one morning white with shock and said that he had woken to find Lina leaning over him, her hair brushing his face" (Croggon 258). Anna concludes at that time that Lina is a "restless spirit" (Croggon 258). Three different people claim to have seen a ghost. However, Anna's narrative purpose is that of relating events that have happened in the past. Since Croggon does not present the reader with a clear appearance of Lina's spirit in Hammel's framing narrative, the question whether it actually exists remains unanswered. Although Croggon's novel features the supernatural as an established fact of the world, she treats the existence of ghosts as ambiguously as Brontë does.

In *Black Spring*, the story world is an extension of Brontë's world, featuring a complex political system as well as supernatural elements that place it firmly within the genre of speculative fiction. This extension can "change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally" (Hutcheon 28), which is the case with *Black Spring*. The magical powers represent agency and power, which Lina is able to obtain in ways that Catherine was never able to.

7. Themes

According to Hutcheon, "[t]hemes are perhaps the easiest story elements to see as adaptable across media and even genres or framing contexts" (10). Croggon chooses various themes from *Wuthering Heights* to adapt for her own work, the most prominent of which is the theme of marginalisation. Croggon's story world is violent: not only does the political system of vendetta exist, encouraging cycles of vengeance, women are also marginalised by both the royal house, which considers them possessions of males (Croggon 79), and the wizarding clans, who have witches killed whenever they can (Croggon 43). The royal house remains a distant force, but the wizard Ezra is present throughout the book. He is described as brutal: "a bitter rage seemed

knitted in his very bones, and what in some was a harsh justice, was in him cruel and vicious" (Croggon 81). Lina also has violent tendencies. She curses Masko (Croggon 116) and supports Damek in his own revenge against Masko (Croggon 92). When Masko dies painfully, Lina rejoices (Croggon 233). This is understandable after his abuse, which includes a rape that inspires her to live for revenge even after she initially considers suicide (Croggon 142-3). The rape remains a secret, since, in Croggon's story world, Lina would be blamed and killed if people found out (Croggon 147). Lina's gender inhibits her from having power and keeps her in a marginalised position.

Both Lina and Anna reflect on their womanhood extensively throughout the novel. Anna, while telling her story to Hammel, explains that "because I am a woman, what I say counts for little in the world. But all the same, I watch and I think my own thoughts" (Croggon 77). She keeps quiet, because she knows her opinions would get her killed (Croggon 77). When she is young, Lina wishes she were a boy, feeling her gender limits the freedom she is so desperate for (Croggon 97-8). Before her magic is repressed, she abhors the thought of being married, thinking it means "to be the drudge of some idiot man, to be at his beck & call, to spend every moment of my day & night as a possession, no better than livestock" (Croggon 135). When she does eventually get married, this disgust shifts to motherhood: even after she gets pregnant, Lina does not want to be a mother (Croggon 170). However, the birth gives her a sense of clarity: she detests both her husband and Damek, who fight to possess her, and rejects the system that claims that as a woman she should be quiet and demure (Croggon 225). In the same breath, she reclaims her identity as a witch, scaring but also delighting Anna, who agrees with Lina's sentiment (Croggon 225-6). The climax of the novel, when Lina kills Ezra and dies, centres both Lina and Anna's feelings on womanhood and the marginalisation of their sex. Lina refuses to bow to Ezra and the laws that would kill her for being a woman with magic and Anna becomes even more fiercely protective of her, explicitly stating that "Lina's only real

crime was to be born a woman, with powers and instincts that were thought proper to belong only to a man" (Croggon 244). She goes on to say that "I had always felt for Lina the compassion and love of a sister; now I felt too the loyalty and indignation of our common sex" (Croggon 245). Summarily, it is female rage that is presented as the ultimate climax of *Black Spring* and as its central theme.

Coats writes that "YA texts are more likely than children's books to explicitly problematize issues of embodiment, considering weight, ability, and the visibility of racial difference in light of dominant cultural narratives" (199). To this assessment, I explicitly add the aspect of gender. If the protagonist of a YA novel is assumed to represent its intended audience, then the message of *Black Spring* is aimed at young women. Croggon explores gender and marginalisation in a society that is set against women and in doing so invites readers to reflect on these subjects. Coats claims that especially in speculative novels, teens respond to the text as "a literature of … the possibility to make a world in which the disenfranchised are empowered" (1202). This empowerment becomes even more evident when looking at *Black Spring* specifically as an adaptation. Hutcheon claims that "[i]n the name of relevance, adapters seek the 'right' resetting or recontextualizing" (146) as a type of transculturation, which is often done with regards to racial and gender politics. Such is the case with Lina, who focuses more on gender and has more agency as a woman than Catherine. Nevertheless, Lina is not a typical strong, female protagonist in YA; one who affects change and represents hope for the future. The only person who gets to enjoy, to some extent, the results of Lina's struggles is her daughter, who is the only one left, together with Anna, at the novel's hopeful ending.

According to Cart, "[o]ne of fantasy's most attractive features has been its implicit invitation to escape this careworn world for a visit to a more appealing one, if only in one's imagination" (98-9). However, this observation is questionable when looking at the fabula, themes and story world of *Black Spring*. Although the existence of magic can be appealing to

young readers and older readers alike, the story world does not allow for enjoyment of the magic except for at a terrible price. To imagine themselves happy in the world of Croggon, young readers would have to distance themselves from the style and genre characteristics of *Black Spring* to the point of creating another adaptation. Coats explains that "[t]he stories that teens tend to be interested in are usually more focused on how things break rather than how they work" (260). This is because teens know that the binary between good and evil is fraught with complexities and that things are not always simply a triumph of good over evil. The fabulas of both *Wuthering Heights* and *Black Spring* lend themselves well to this understanding of stories for teens and it is therefore understandable that Croggon was drawn to Brontë's novel as an adaptable source for young readers.

8. Conclusion

Coats describes how "there are certain lessons that we seem to want all children and teens to learn in order to function in social groups, such as kindness, cooperation, overcoming selfishness, and taking responsibility for one's actions" (613). Granted that this is the case with *Black Spring*, the novel does this through showing what can happen if you are unable to learn these skills and habits. Lina Jr. is praised for her kind heart and rewarded with freedom, whereas Damek and Lina suffer the consequences of their dysfunctionality in society. However, Lina in particular is not simply portrayed as a bad example to be abhorred: she is trapped in the society and the systems that lead her down the path which eventually leads to her demise. She is presented as a victim rather than a perpetrator. Anna is critical of Lina and Damek, but she also describes the complex ways in which their actions can be understood and empathised with. Coats writes that "YA literature is especially notorious for its focus on social and moral problems and its morally ambiguous endings" (613). This point is exemplified by *Black Spring*, which, through its multi-layered, character-focused narrative, sets up a tragedy with a hopeful ending which leaves the reader not wholly satisfied. Croggon's novel presents

its reader with a story of adolescent self-discovery and morality, but it does so via complicated, subversive characters instead of the young heroes that are commonly found in speculative YA novels. In the next chapter, I examine this hopeful thread, as well as the focus on marginalisation, in a retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Chapter 2: *Heartstone* by Elle Katharine White

1. Introduction

2016 saw the publication of Elle Katharine's White debut novel *Heartstone*, which is described on her website as a "historical fantasy that recasts Jane Austen's beloved *Pride & Prejudice* in an imaginative world of wyverns, dragons, and the warriors who fight alongside them" ("Heartstone"). Again, the YA genre is not mentioned. However, the book is listed as YA on readers' platform Goodreads. An analysis of the novel will show how it fits into the YA genre and why it can be classified as such despite the fact that it is primarily referred to as just a fantasy novel.

Pride and Prejudice is regarded as a quintessential romance novel. Literary scholar Pamela Regis dedicates a chapter to *Pride and Prejudice* in her study *A Natural History of the Romance Novel.* This chapter is titled "The Best Romance Novel Ever Written: *Pride and Prejudice,* 1813". In this chapter, Regis calls Austen "the master of the romance novel" (75), stating that "[s]he published six but had she written only *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), her command of the form would be indisputable" (75). *Pride and Prejudice's* lasting popularity is exemplified by the amount of adaptations that it has inspired. Academic Deborah Cartmell goes as far as to declare that "[i]f there is such a thing as an adaptation genre, *Pride and Prejudice* is at the heart of it" (227) in her article "*Pride and Prejudice* and the Adaptation Genre". The novel's popularity within the adaptation genre is undeniable and presents us with several case studies, including White's *Heartstone,* which is the first book in a trilogy and offers a speculative take on Austen's novel while retaining its focus on interpersonal relationships and socio-economic class. For an effective analysis, I first provide a summary of the novel.

Aliza Bentaine lives in a world filled with supernatural creatures. The creatures who are friendly are referred to as Shani and those who are unfriendly are referred to as Tekari. After the youngest daughter of the Bentaine family is killed by a gryphon, a Tekari, the county

hires Riders to slay the horde. This group of Riders consists of upper-class young men and women, including a dragon Rider of the Daired family. Aliza and Alastair Daired get off on the wrong foot, but spend more time together when Aliza's sister Anjey develops a close relationship with Daired's friend Brysney. However, the Riders abruptly leave the county, leaving Anjey heartbroken. Soon after, Daired proposes marriage to Aliza, who declines. Afterwards, she begins to regret this. When tragedy hits and a gargantuan Tekari attacks their country Arle, she is terrified of losing Daired. After he suffers a fatal injury, she braves vicious lamias to learn how to save him, breaking the rules of social class in the process. Daired survives and the huge Tekari is defeated, allowing Aliza and Daired to marry and face whatever challenges are to come as a married couple.

In the following section I examine White's adaptation by analysing the novels' narration, style, characters, fabula, genre conventions and themes.

2. Narration

The narrator in White's *Heartstone* is a character-bound narrator (Bal 22). Using first-person perspective, the narration follows White's main character Aliza Bentaine through the events of the novel. This first-person narration is typical of the YA genre (Thein and Sulzer 47). Whereas Austen presents her readers with the thoughts and feelings of various people in her novel, White's narrative agency remains exclusively attached to Aliza. For example, when Aliza is looking for the manor's ledger which has been hidden by someone, the narration follows Aliza as she comes to the realisation it might be hidden in an armour. In italics, White writes "[c]ould it be so simple?" (151), representing a direct thought by Aliza. Moreover, whereas Austen's narrator offers direct insight into Mr. Darcy's feelings, despite the fact that Elizabeth remains unaware of them, the narrator in *Heartstone* does no such thing. For example, Aliza muses: "I noticed Daired watching me when I emerged from the stables. He hadn't moved from his place at the gate, eyes fixed on me with an intensity that made me blush. I had no wish to impress him, but it still stung, the way he'd singled me out for such blatant criticism" (White 103).

Daired is already in love with the heroine at this point and is not criticising her. However, this is not relayed to the audience until Daired confesses his love to Aliza. As long as the heroine does not know something, information is not offered to the reader either. In doing so, the reader is invited to identify with Aliza. Any partiality that the narrator displays is therefore attributable to Aliza's personal biases.

White also introduces chapter titles, whereas Austen only uses numbers for her chapters. With these, White not only summarises the chapter ahead, but also attaches a distinct interpretation to its contents. Thus Chapter 18 is named "The Dangers of Listening to One's Aunt" (White 224). This chapter features Aliza joining her aunt on an excursion to Daired's personal estate after being persuaded by her that there is no danger of running into him. Aptly, the chapter concludes with the line "[a] shirtless Daired sat on a bench next to the herb beds" (White 235). Aliza's fear, alluded to in the chapter title, is thereby justified. The chapter titles are the only instances of narration in which the reader is presented with information that Aliza does not yet have. However, even the chapter titles remain attached to Aliza's personal perspective. Austen's narrator is able to give a more nuanced view of the situation by showcasing the perspective of multiple characters, albeit with a clear bias towards Elizabeth Bennet.

The narrator in *Pride and Prejudice* is an external narrator: a narrator who identifies itself but does not feature in the novel as a character (Bal 27). This narrator remains imperceptible throughout most of Austen's novel. *Pride and Prejudice's* iconic opening line ("It is a truth universally acknowledged …") is phrased without referring to a source. It is not until the novel nears its conclusion that the narrator identifies itself as an 'I'. Austen writes: "I wish I could say, for the sake of her family, that the accomplishment of [Mrs. Bennet's]s earnest desire in the establishment of so many of her children, produced so happy an effect as to make her a sensible, amiable, well-informed woman for the rest of her life" (364). This 'I' remains

mysterious and featureless and does not show up again. According to Mieke Bal, this is not uncommon. She writes that "[a] narrator may … suddenly begin to refer to itself, sometimes in such a subtle manner that the reader hardly notices" (Bal 29). Such is the case with the narrator of *Pride and Prejudice*, whose introduction takes place late in the novel and is easy to miss.

Mieke Bal notes how an external narrator can show partiality to certain characters in a text (27). The narrator of Austen's novel offers commentary and explanations in favour of the heroine Elizabeth Bennet. For example, it explains that Elizabeth shifts her attention away from her dread surrounding Lydia's departure with the regiment since "to fret over unavoidable evils, or augment them by anxiety, was no part of her disposition" (Austen 224). Elizabeth might have prevented the tragedy if she had pushed, but her choice not to push is connected to one of her positive traits. Mrs. Bennet, on the other hand, is not one of the narrator's favourites. The narrator goes as far as to hold her responsible for Lydia's choice to elope with Wickham with no certainty of marriage. It declares that Mrs. Bennet is "blaming every body but the person to whose ill judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must be principally owing" (Austen 273). The narrator thus does not merely present events to the reader so that they can form their own opinions about them. Instead, it manipulates the reader by judging whose behaviour is justifiable and whose is not.

3. Style

The distinctions between Austen and White's works also reveal themselves through their style. The 2014 Penguin Classics edition of *Pride and Prejudice* has 367 pages. Its font size is comparable to that of *Heartstone*, but, like *Black Spring*, *Heartstone* has larger margins. Due to these larger margins, *Heartstone* has 333 pages total. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kim Wilkins has found, YA novels are generally shorter than adult texts (6). White's text features a lot of dialogue and her words are to-the-point. For example, Wynce Curdred, who parallels Austen's Mr. Collins, plainly states: "I can't wait to meet this Daired of yours. Have

I mentioned that his aunt, Lady Catriona, is an acquaintance of mine?" (White 132). This direct speech features short sentences and no embellishments. Austen, on the other hand, writes that "Mr. Collins was eloquent in [Lady Catherine's] praise. The subject elevated him to more than usual solemnity of manner, and with a most important aspect he protested that he had never in his life witnessed such behaviour in a person of rank — such affability and condescension, as he had himself experiences from Lady Catherine" (Austen 65). This section features long, trailing sentences typical of 19th century literature, including several commas and an em-dash. White's language centres around the action of the story and places the focus solely on the story. Austen, on the other hand, spends more time contextualising her text.

The tone of the two novels differs greatly as well. White's world is characterised by the many creatures that live there, human as well as Shani and Tekari. This adds a constant threat to every description and interaction. For example, White notes that "[i]t'd been too long since [the] Manor-folk had been able to go for a stroll in the woods without fearing for [their] lives" (47). The families who live in and around the manor are concerned because a horde of Tekari has taken up residence in the woods. Once they have been removed, these woods should be safe to stroll through again — until the next group of Tekari chooses it for a home. Austen's Elizabeth has no such worries. She walks three miles to Netherfield Park, "crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity" (Austen 33) with no concern for her safety. The difference in tone is also exemplified by the descriptions of House Pendragon, Daired's family estate, and Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's family estate. House Pendragon is described as having "a spare, stark splendor to it, reflecting the harshness and the majesty of the mountains. Pillared collonades and archways of white marble led into shadows of blue and violet" (White 234). House Pendragon is the proud ancestral home of a family of warriors and serves a military function. Pemberley, on the other hand, is described as "a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by

a ridge of high woody hills" (Austen 235). Elizabeth claims that "[s]he had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by awkward taste" (Austen 235). Pemberley represents the renown of the Darcy's by connecting them to the splendour of nature. Although White's Arle is an alternate version of the United Kingdom, it is separated from Austen's world by the constant threat that its people are under from the Tekari. Whereas Austen's characters are free to focus on the beauty of nature and their most important concerns are their interpersonal relationships, White's characters are constantly trying to stay safe. This is translated into White's to-the-point writing style and focus on danger and protection measures in her descriptions.

4. Characters

As mentioned before, interpersonal relationships are a prominent aspect of both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Heartstone*. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the fabulas are highly affected by the differences between the characters of the two novels. The most significant characters are Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy and Aliza and Daired respectively. However, the characterisation of several supporting characters establishes further nuance and reveals a genre-appropriate pattern of women with agency. In doing so, White follows Coats' findings on YA as a literature of possibility, in which the disenfranchised are empowered (1202). As this thesis shows, this theme is particularly present in YA speculative fiction and retellings.

The main characters of the two novels are Austen's Elizabeth and White's Aliza. Both of them are well-liked, intelligent young women with a deep love for their families. Unlike Elizabeth, who has slight affinity with playing the piano but shows no interest in other hobbies or skills, Aliza defines herself both as an artist and a herbmaster. As a herbmaster, she is on a par with her uncle, a professional herbmaster under whom she trained briefly (White 90). Elizabeth is chiefly defined by her quickness, which is ascribed to her by other characters as well as the narrator and herself. The narrator describes her as having "more quickness of

observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister [Jane]" (Austen 17) and Elizabeth asserts: "I have prided myself on my discernment" (Austen 201). Her greatest skill is her discernment of situations and people, which is an intellectual skill. Aliza, on the other hand, is a doer. For example, she and her sister Anjey lead the Riders to the gryphon horde (White 72). Despite her risk-taking, however, Aliza is sensible and thinks things through, like Elizabeth. This is how she is able to find a hidden ledger (White 152), as well as find the necessary information about the cure of Daired's lethal wound (White 293).

Contrary to Aliza, Elizabeth is also described several times by her light-heartedness. Austen speaks of her "lively, playful disposition, which [delights] in anything ridiculous" (Austen 14). *Pride and Prejudice's* narrator ties this light-heartedness into her general disposition: she is quick to move on from disappointments (Austen 89). Aliza does not have the opportunity to be as light-hearted as Elizabeth, since she lives in a world that is much more dangerous: her little sister's death takes place only two months before the start of the novel and throughout the text, she is faced with death too often to forget how abruptly life can end. This may also explain why Aliza is not fooled by Wydrick's affable nature, White's parallel to Mr. Wickham. Aliza is immediately suspicious of him (White 63) and she considers him a fool at a later meeting (White 118). She is not convinced by his explanation of his history with the Daired family (White 128), because she does not have the luxury of blindly trusting someone.

In typical YA fashion, Aliza rebels against the societal expectations put upon her. This shows primarily in her adherence to her own set of principles, which she refuses to compromise on even when she is faced with powerful social figures such as Daired or Herreki, the leader of all dragons. Her first meeting with Daired includes her criticising him for kicking a hobgoblin (White 6). Later, she refuses his offer to teach her how to fight, because she does not want to kill creatures (White 95). Since being a warrior is highly-regarded in Arle and being taught by a Daired would be a great honour, her blunt refusal underlines her commitment to her

principles. When Herreki confronts her for riding Akarra, which only Daired is allowed to do, and accuses her of doing so for glory, Aliza plainly responds that Herreki is wrong (White 316). This almost gets her killed; Herreki's attempt on her life is stopped just in time by Daired. Like Croggon's Lina, Aliza is an outsider, relatable to a young audience because they can "recogni[se] their teenage emotions related to disconnection" (Garcia 59). This is more the case for her than it is for Elizabeth. In Aliza's case, it has much to do with her socio-economic status and the way she treats the class differences in her world. Aliza rejects the status symbols that lead to power: she has no interest in fighting and, when riding Akarra, thinks to herself "[g]ive me earth and growing things … [y]ou can keep the wind" (White 77). Moreover, she remains an outsider when she becomes a non-rider who steps into battle to protect her loved ones.

Aliza's sense of self-respect and the respect she demands of others can be traced back to Elizabeth. For example, Elizabeth asks Mr. Collins to treat her "not as an elegant female intending to plague [him], but as a rational creature speaking to [him] from her heart" (Austen 106). However, she moves within the boundaries that are put upon her by her class. Her own strong principles mostly affect her personal relationships. For example, when her friend Charlotte decides to marry Mr. Collins. Elizabeth judges her choice (Austen 133). After Charlotte's decision, Elizabeth does not think of her in intimate terms anymore, despite having to admit that Charlotte does not regret her marriage (Austen 144). Elizabeth's principles also show with regards to Lady Catherine. She refuses to be cowed by Lady Catherine's money and rank and does not consider herself to be lesser than Mr. Darcy for her lack of money and connections.

Since Austen's narrator shows a clear bias for Elizabeth, she is presented to the reader as sensible and optimistic. To a certain extent, this narrational presentation flattens Elizabeth's character out: Austen leaves little room for her to act out of character. Aliza, on the other hand, is constantly thrust into dangerous situations and forced to adapt. She can follow a path that

would have been unimaginable for her at the start of the novel without compromising her principles. This aspect makes her character more rounded.

Mr. Darcy and Daired are also greatly affected by the world they live in. Whereas Mr. Darcy's pride stems mostly from the social conventions of the time, Daired's self-importance is directly related to his role as a protector. According to the Bennet's neighbourhood, Mr. Darcy's greatest fault is his lack of manners, which drowns out his wealth and nobility (Austen 12). Daired is rude and inhospitable as well. He initially dismisses Aliza as "a country wench who spends her time in the company of garden pests" (White 37). These garden pests, the hobgoblins, are creatures who are beneath Daired's notice. He reserves this notice for the powerful Shani who bond with Riders, such as his own partner, the dragon Akarra. The Daireds are the only family who are able to bond with dragons, which is why they have such high status. Daired takes his status very seriously: his bond with Akarra as well as his privileged upbringing as a warrior make him capable of protecting the weak, which he considers his duty. Daired's life "is sworn to the protection of the weak and defenseless" (White 214). He draws a distinct line between Riders and Nakla, non-riders. Daired believes in justice, but it is a justice that he himself gets to define and because of this he is also capable of adjusting it: despite Aliza's refusal to adapt to his world view in which being a Rider and hunting Tekari puts him above everyone else, she impresses him to the extent that he develops respect for her way of living.

Daired's characterisation is complicated by the presence of Akarra. The dragon Daired is partnered with is intelligent and communicates with the other characters through speech. Akarra is the wise and reasonable voice to Daired's explosive and rude personality. She shows no disdain for Nakla or other Shani, although she is of a much higher rank than them, and she disregards traditions when dealing with matters of life and death, which she deems far more important (White 76). Whereas in Austen's novel Darcy's letter to Elizabeth marks the first occasion where he is able to communicate without antagonising someone, in White's novel it

is Akarra who explains the situation (White 208). Akarra's positive relationship with Daired instantly puts him in a better light with Aliza, since she trusts in Akarra's judgement. She is an extension of his character that allows him more nuance than Mr. Darcy is given.

The most notable supporting characters are the other Bentaine's. These characters gain complexity and relatability in White's novel, while still upholding their distinct roles in the fabula. In *Pride and Prejudice,* the Bennets are presented as an example of an ill-matched couple, whose affection for each other has vanished early on in their marriage (Austen 228). Mrs. Bennet is described as "a woman of mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper" (Austen 7) whose only concerns are marriage and gossip. The narrator consistently looks down on Mrs. Bennet and contrasts her with Mr. Bennet, who is an "odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" (Austen 7). Mrs. Bennet is committed to her children's futures. Her main goal is to portray them positively wherever she goes to make them desirable parties for marriage to well-off men (Austen 7). For the sake of this purpose, she does not hesitate to send her eldest daughter into the rain with a risk of catching a cold (Austen 31). She criticises her husband for leaving their daughters without much money to their name when he will die and claims that if she were in his shoes she would have made an attempt to prevent their estate from falling to Mr. Collins (Austen 61). However, she is aware that she has no such power, which increases her wish to see her daughters safely married (Austen 11). The cares of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet revolve around money, since financial destitution is the danger that they anticipate. Their attitudes and actions are based on the parochial pettiness of the world that they live in. Austen writes that "[h]ad she found Jane in any apparent danger, Mrs. Bennet would have been very miserable" (41), implying that her attitude to Jane's cold is only nonchalant because she is not in danger and would be different if her daughter faced real danger instead.

White creates a world in which danger is everywhere and this difference in context greatly affects both Robart and Moira Bentaine. The Bentaine's have a strong relationship.

Robart is primarily concerned with the safety of his daughters after the death of his youngest, Rina. This makes him similar to Mrs. Bennet. Moira has the same concerns and she has much more power in the family than her Austenian counterpart. For example, when Robart is unwilling to send his two eldest daughters to show the Riders around, Moira interferes by saying: "[n]o, Robert, it's settled. They will go, and they will go with your blessing" (White 51). This remark ends the discussion immediately. Like Mrs. Bennet, Moira Bentaine is focused solely on seeing her daughters married. White notes that "[a]fter Rina's death, [she] had made it her avowed object to get her daughters out of Hart's Run" (White 27). Marriage is a method to secure safety for her daughters. However, Moira has no care for the important men to whom she wants to marry off her daughters when one of them returns home wounded. Instead she ignores them to get to her daughters as soon as possible (White 285). When Aliza's sister Leyda is assumed to be dead, Moira falls apart (White 282). Contrarily, after Lydia elopes with Mr. Wickham, Mrs. Bennet is described as theatrical to the point of being disingenuous (Austen 273). White's Moira Bentaine is a reflection of Mrs. Bennet in a world in which danger is prevalent and has already taken one daughter from her. The biased, character-bound narrator of White's novel allows her more depth and relatability, speaking of her with empathy and love.

Most significantly, the characterisation of Lydia and Leyda differ as a result of their societies. According to Austen's narrator, Lydia is pretty and self-assured, but also "self-willed and careless" (206). At fifteen years old, she is still a self-centred child and "neither her virtue nor her understanding" (Austen 266) prevents her from falling victim to Wickham. After her marriage to Mr. Wickham, she remains unchanged: "Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (Austen 298). Leyda, on the other hand, longs for adventure and goes out to find it (White 227). She is persuaded by Wydrick to come fight the powerful Tekari that attacks Arle and writes that, when she returns, she will "finally be the

Bentaine girl worth noticing" (White 281). When Wydrick betrays her and she is saved by Daired in the nick of time, she does not react as Lydia did: instead, Leyda is full of "tearful apologies" (White 285) as soon as she is returned to her family and later Aliza notes that "[the encounter with the Tekari] had transformed our little sister" (White 329). This is exemplary of Wilkins' findings that "[i]n YA fiction … aspects of learning who one is are tied to very high dramatic stakes: they become matters of life or death" (Wilkins 20). Leyda almost loses her life when she attempts to grow into a better version of herself. More serious and careful now, Leyda has evolved at the end of the novel into a girl who will no longer rush into anything.

One more character undergoes a striking change: Lady Catriona, counterpart of Austen's Lady Catherine. The latter is described as having no "extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue" (Austen 158) but merely the "stateliness of money and rank" (Austen 158). Her character illustrates that the things society values highly are not that impressive. Instead, wit and kindness, qualities which are found in the heroine Elizabeth and her loved ones, are more important. Lady Catherine revels in admiration and criticises people on every aspect of their lives, considering herself the authority on all subjects (Austen 160-3). The reason she attempts to stop Mr. Darcy from marrying Elizabeth is because Elizabeth is unworthy on the basis of her rank and lack of wealth (Austen 334-6). In White's novel, this obsession with rank is not assigned to Lady Catriona, but to Herreki, her bonded dragon. Lady Catriona is the one who has a personal relationship with the other characters, but all of Lady Catherine's strictness and disapproval is taken up by Herreki.

Like Lady Catherine does for Mr. Collins, Lady Catriona is patron to Curdred and takes Gwyn, White's parallel to Charlotte, under her wing when she marries him. However, Lady Catriona does this far more wholeheartedly. She is not easily offended, dotes on children and is committed to making Gwyn's pregnancy as comfortable as possible (White 180-1). White writes that "motherhood [makes] all women equal" (181) and Lady Catriona seems to share

this opinion. She does not insist on her rank and has no issue with Aliza's and Daired's eventual engagement (White 322). However, in White's world, Aliza commits a crime more serious than marrying above her station: she rides on a dragon's back. Since her actions allow her to save Daired's life, Lady Catriona does not mind. She avows that "[n]o matter how foolish or insubordinate your actions might've been, my nephew owes you his life, and that means more to me than all the honor in the world" (White 323). Herreki does not share her opinion. When she finds out that Aliza rode on Akarra's back, she nearly kills her (White 315). Daired barely manages to stop her by calling upon her duty to his family and himself. This appeal only works because Herreki is obsessed with the Daired family name and legacy. As with Austen's Lady Catherine, Herreki's power eventually comes to nothing: she is unable to kill Aliza for her offence and is forced to accept her into the Daired family. Herreki is an extension of Catriona's character in the same way that Akarra is for Daired. However, whereas Akarra showcases Daired's softer side, Herreki functions as the adaptation of Lady Catherine's rougher side.

Similarly to Croggon's novel, White creates more well-rounded and complex characters than Austen did in her original text. By giving the women of *Heartstone* more depth and agency, White comments on the 19th century conventions that led Austen to create flat characters such as Mrs. Bennet, Lydia and Lady Catherine. The women are allowed dynamic character arcs that change their lives, particularly in the case of Leyda. According to Coats, such growth makes characters more relatable to younger audiences (657). White delivers relatable, complex characters who affect real change in the world around them and thus perfectly represent the potential of young people who care about the world they live in.

5. Fabula

Heartstone makes several notable changes to the fabula of Austen's novel. As mentioned above, *Heartstone's* narration is focused on its heroine's experiences, contrary to Austen's narration, which showcases the broader socio-economic elements of 19th century

Britain. The manner in which the fabulas of the two novels are set up can be approached from a similar angle. Austen writes about the every-day occurrence of marital unions and interpersonal relationships. White seems to take a similar approach. However, she hints that there is more to her fabula from the start of the novel.

Near the end, White's fabula deviates from Austen's in a distinct and abrupt way as she introduces the rise of the Greater Lindworm, an event that has direct and lasting effects for the population of the entire country. This event is subtly foreshadowed in the beginning of the novel: when Brysney, his sister Charis and their friends arrive, they are known for defeating the Lesser Lindworm, a powerful Tekari. Further on in the novel, the attack by the Greater Lindworm is foreshadowed again. When Aliza has a run-in with a powerful humanoid Tekari, he informs her that "[t]hings are now in motion, old, deep things that you cannot stop, cannot defeat" (White 154) and that "[i]t is coming" (White 154). These two moments set up the arrival of the Greater Lindworm and move White's fabula beyond Austen's focus on romantic entanglements.

When the Greater Lindworm appears, the plot of *Heartstone* takes a turn. In Austen's novel a similar shift happens when Lydia and Mr. Wickham elope together. Right as Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth seem to be heading in a positive direction, they are interrupted by a tragedy. The same thing happens to Daired and Aliza: Brysney appears with the news of the Greater Lindworm's arrival when Aliza and Daired are about to confess their feelings to each other (White 271). Very soon, Leyda becomes involved in this plot point. She has joined the fight against the Tekari at the behest of Wydrick, who later betrays her gruesomely. However, contrary to Lydia's elopement with Wickham, which revolves around her character and the consequences of her actions, this climactic event is not merely about Leyda. The Greater Lindworm's appearance is a country-wide cataclysm. Countless people lose their lives in the battle and the amount of destruction can only result in a structural crisis of food and safety, if

they survive the monster's attacks at all. Tekari flock to the Greater Lindworm's side, using its power to attempt to destroy humankind (White 272).

As with Lydia's elopement, White's equivalent of Darcy is involved more intimately in this turn of events. In the case of White's novel, this involvement not only allows him to personally save Leyda and return her to her family (White 284), an act which parallels Darcy financing Lydia's marriage and protecting her family's reputation; it also causes him to be grievously wounded by the Greater Lindworm (White 291). The poison of the Greater Lindworm is deadly and has no known cure. In a departure from Austen's fabula, White sentences Daired to death; he would die were it not for the quick thinking and brave actions of Aliza. Aliza realises that the Tekari may know a cure to the Lindworm's poison and bargains with her life to receive the information from them. To do this, she breaks one of society's first rules: she rides Akarra. Speaking to the Tekari almost kills her twice — first when they attack her and then when Akarra protects her by breathing fire (White 300).

Once the Greater Lindworm has been killed by Charis, order is restored and the plot of Austen's novel is continued: Brysney and Anjey reunite and get engaged, Aliza accepts Daired despite Herreki's disapproval and the younger two Bentaine girls remain safely with their parents. However, *Heartstone* is the first novel in a trilogy which follows Aliza and Daired in their married life as they face more Tekari. The battle with the Greater Lindworm is revealed to be a foretaste rather than a climax and a larger war is starting; one that does not affect only the country, but the entire world. This gives *Heartstone* a "typical cliff-hanger ending that entices readers to pick up the next book and the next book" (Garcia 18), which Garcia identifies as typical of the YA genre. However, the ending features the distinctive hope that Cart discusses (125) as well: love overcomes all evil in White's novel. This further establishes that the hopeful endings Cart discusses are not limited to dystopian YA novels, but are a distinct aspect of YA speculative fiction as a whole. Aliza's aunt summarises this theme. She states:

"[y]ou've already passed through peace and war, fire and blood, and gods know you'll pass through more of it before the end. This life you're trying to make together won't be easy … But then again, nothing worthwhile ever is. Promise you'll never stop fighting for each other" (White 332-3). The novel ends on Aliza's affirmative response to this. Although this is not the true ending to the story and there will be sequels, the tone is set: together, the protagonist and her love interest can find their happy ending despite the dangers. Aliza and Daired's love affects the fate of the country, which makes White's fabula a global narrative rather than a private one.

6. Genre

Heartstone interacts with the boundaries of the speculative YA genre in various ways. In most ways, it follows the genre conventions; its cliff-hanger, as mentioned at the end of the last section, is an example of this. *Heartstone* also has three out of four elements that Garcia identifies as typical of YA: "a protagonist that feels out of place, a protagonist with special powers, a giant, globe-threatening villain [and] a heterosexual love interest" (23). Although Aliza lacks any special powers, the other three aspects are present in *Heartstone*: Aliza does not connect with her society's emphasis on warriors; the Greater Lindworm is a grand villain and an even more global villain, the Silent King of Els, is teased throughout the novel; and Daired is Aliza's heterosexual love interest.

Since the novel is part of the YA fantasy sub-genre, it also engages with several tropes of fantasy literature. According to Wilkins, "[c]astles, dualistic good and evil, fantastic realms, and an unlikely saviour are such common tropes that they are sometimes derided as cliché, or parodied affectionately by fantasy readers" (13). White's novel features good and evil in its distinction between the monsters, Tekari, and the other supernatural creatures, the Shani. Lastly, she creates an unlikely saviour in Aliza, who saves Daired from certain death. Wilkins also identifies a "distinctive narrative shape" (23) in YA fantasy novels: "the doorstop text with an extended middle made up of small servings of dramatic interest (defeating escalating

supernatural and/or violent threats), often on the way to facing a larger, defining supernatural and/or violent threat" (23). This applies to *Heartstone* as well. Throughout the novel, Aliza faces gryphons, trolls, lamia's and eventually the Greater Lindworm. Moreover, the Greater Lindworm is not the final threat: White foreshadows that the Silent King of Els, a powerful creature from another continent, is the true villain of her trilogy. *Heartstone* is about finding love and defeating the Greater Lindworm; the trilogy is about defeating the Silent King of Els. Wilkins identifies this as typical of YA: "[t]he shift from concerns about self to concerns about the safety of whole nations is common in [Young Adult Fantasy] series … , raising the stakes from one book to the next" (26). This aspect of YA is not relevant for my other two case studies, since they are stand-alones, but applies seamlessly to *Heartstone*. Wilkins' findings can be extended beyond fantasy into general speculative YA fiction.

According to Wilkins, "[Young Adult Fantasy] brings together two established genres with devoted readerships – young adult fiction and fantasy fiction – and in so doing amplifies and energises some of the most recognisable aspects of these two genres" (3). *Heartstone* supports this finding. By presenting a trope-filled fantasy world, White leaves room for commentary on things such as gender, class and romance. This is in line with YA's characteristic of challenging existing social structures and showing the potential for young people to change the world. Garcia writes: "[d]espite the harsh conditions of the world around them, the extraordinary characters must push against the machinations of adults and better the future society. These protagonists are working from a minority position. It's an endearing message for young people: they embody the capacity to challenge, to lead, to revolutionize" (Garcia 72). Case studies such as *Heartstone* support his findings: Aliza and her friends are overturning expectations and social structures through their love and bravery.

Heartstone has a powerful female protagonist. Wilkins finds that "iconic female characters from YA books such as Katniss Everdeen or Tris Prior have encouraged a new

expectation that women, especially young women, have strength, skill, and stamina enough to save the world" (19). Aliza exemplifies this young woman. Strong young female characters are a clear pattern in YA literature and YA speculative fiction has the opportunity to pit them against world-threatening dangers and let them come out victorious. Because of this, YA speculative fiction adds a unique dimension to the discussion of womanhood in YA fiction as a whole.

Heartstone also belongs to the historical fiction genre. As discussed in chapter 1, Wilkins notes that "[h]istorical settings allow young adult characters to drive the narrative with more agency, and to do so from a less safe social position, because they are not cocooned by family" (16-7). As discussed in chapter 1, however, Wilkins focuses solely on medieval fantasy. In the case of *Heartstone,* which takes place in a world inspired by 19th century Britain, the young adult characters are very much cocooned by their families, to the point where Leyda feels the need to run away to establish her own identity. Although the Bentaine family is not as powerful as for example the Daired's, they are not destitute. They are well-respected upper-middle-class workers. Wilkins' thesis does not allow for the differences between historical periods and should be expanded on. It is key to acknowledge that historical YA fiction is a heterogeneous sub-genre, considering the vast amount of time periods they use for their settings.

Pride and Prejudice is set in a realistic world, governed by heritage, love and wealth. In Austen's world, the marriage plot takes centre stage. This trope, briefly defined by literary scholar Mary-Catherine Harrison as "a story of heterosexual love and courtship culminating in marriage" (3) in her study "Reading the Marriage Plot," is a staple of the genre most commonly assigned to *Pride and Prejudice*: the romance genre. Per the introduction of this chapter, *Pride and Prejudice'*s status within the romance genre is exceptionally strong. Regis named a chapter after the novel for a reason: it is a well-loved classic of the genre. Although several marriages

take place in *Heartstone,* this is presented as a by-product of the novel's proceedings instead of the goal, differentiating White's text from Austen's. However, Austen is also known for deviating from the classic romance plot of her time. Literary scholar E.J. Clery observes that Austen's departure from existing conventions at the time was "something startling and new in the history of the novel" (167). She notes that this departure was central to the marriage plot of the novel. She observes that "romance in Austen is not easy or 'magical'; it's the hard-won reward of the exertions of the characters on the one hand, and of the author, on the other" (Clery 167), pointing out both Austen's skill as a writer and her playful yet realistic take on the marriage plot. The romances and marriages in *Heartstone* are equally hard-won, establishing the novel as a follower of Austen specifically instead of the marriage plot as a general trope. Austen's deviation from contemporary tropes may be part of the reason why her novel has remained popular amongst adapters: Austen tempts adapters to extend her modern opinions into modern times and in doing so reflect on Austen's opinions and 19th century customs.

Literary scholar Amalie Due Svensden offers a different reading of *Pride and Prejudice* in her study "*Pride and Prejudice:* A Bildungsroman." She argues that placing the novel within the romance genre does not account for "[Elizabeth's] psychological development through [the] romance plot" (Svensden 28) and that this aspect of the novel places it within the Bildungsroman genre instead. She defines the Bildungsroman as "a novel of formation focusing on the development of a specific character" (Svensden 28). In doing so, she addresses Regis' research. The latter, however, argues that this character development is inherent to the romance novel. She finds that "[t]he improvement that heroine and hero offer and receive is a primary vehicle for the remaking of society that marriages in the romance novel … bring about" (Regis 77). Although the formation and development of characters is central to *Pride and Prejudice,* Regis thus believes that this characteristic establishes it further as a romance novel rather than drawing it away from the genre. White engages with this character growth in her

own novel and adds a distinct YA tone to it: she focuses on young women entering the adult world and finding their identities, themes that have been identified as key elements of YA literature by scholars such as Wilkins and Coats. The Bildungsroman-aspect identified by Svensden can account for why *Pride and Prejudice* lends itself to a retelling within the romance genre specifically aimed at young adults.

The distinctions between the two novels chime with the stakes in the novels. *Pride and Prejudice* is a leisurely tale, spanning almost a year and focusing on events in which money, love and reputation are the highest stakes. Austen's in depth descriptions of houses and people are directly tied to their importance and monetary value to her characters. White, on the other hand, presents a novel in which the highest stake is the loss of countless lives. Money and status are important, but their value, especially that of money, is connected to protection from bodily harm. For example, Austen's Charlotte marries Mr. Collins for the social and financial security that marriage provides as a young woman in 19th century Great Britain. The financial security acquired by White's Gwyn, on the other hand, is directly linked to physical safety: she marries Curdred to pay off her father's to protect her siblings from harm (White 156). With regards to social class, a similar difference is distinguishable. Austen's Lady Catherine may berate Elizabeth, but has no power to stop her from accepting her nephew's marriage proposal. White's Herreki, on the other hand, is prepared to take Aliza's life for the same transgression.

The stakes in *Heartstone* and *Pride and Prejudice* are primarily determined by the different types of danger that the characters are faced with. The dangers the characters face are inherent to the genres they are part of. White's genre choice is speculative fiction from the very first line of her book. She starts: "I'd never seen an angry hobgoblin before" (White 1). Hobgoblins, which certainly do not feature in Austen's work, represent a broader aspect of White's worldbuilding: her world is filled with non-human creatures, both good and evil, capable and incapable of speech. The line presents a clear break with the genre of the source

text. White engages with Austen's novel in a playful manner throughout her work. For example, the heroine's father, Robart Bentaine, tells his daughter that Brysney "rich and single as he may be, is most definitely not here looking for a wife" (White 12); a direct reference to *Pride and Prejudice's* iconic opening line.

The presence of the supernatural creatures is a matter-of-fact experience to the characters of the novel and to the character-bound narrator. The hobgoblins are a prime example: Aliza knows a few hobgoblins personally, speaks their language and considers them her friends (White 1). The Tekari, on the other hand, are a constant threat who feature in every plot point of the novel. White uses the speculative fiction genre to engage with and expand on the themes put forward by Austen in the original text.

7. Themes

Surviving the life-threatening danger that the supernatural creatures present is the core theme to which all aspects of the plot can be traced. The all-pervading presence of this theme creates a distinct departure from Austen's novel. Although Austen's Bennet girls face the danger of loss of reputation and lack of wealth after their father will have died, they remain relatively safe. Loss of reputation, though harmful, does not result in immediate death. Moreover, destitution is only a risk if there is no possibility of charity from family members such as their aunts and uncles. Although accepting charity would wound them, it would only be a wound of pride.

The dangers in White's world, on the other hand, are physical. Most strikingly, the Bentaine family has already lost a daughter before the start of the novel: Rina, their youngest, was slaughtered by a gryphon within sight of the manor she lived (White 17). The brutal loss of the twelve-year-old girl shakes the family and the entire community. Rina's death is the disaster that leads the village to collect the funds necessary to bring help to the town. This help against a physical threat introduces White's equivalents to Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley into the

story. Unlike Bingley, Brysney does not come to the heroine's village to leisurely spend his money, but to protect its population from danger. His power and skill are what recommends him to Moira Bentaine as a husband for one of her daughters, shaken as she is by the loss of her youngest (White 27).

The level of danger in the novel also affects the actions of the main character. Aliza is pushed to action by danger when Anjey is injured by a gryphon (White 71). She does not hesitate to endanger herself to save Anjey's life. She is faced with a gryphon and kills it, this being the first time she has ever killed anything. This event leads her to reflect: "I killed something, yes, but it would've killed me" (White 83). Thanks to Aliza's actions, Anjey lives and her bond with Brysney deepens; White has thus retold Austen's episode of Jane's cold and her subsequent stay at Netherfield. However, as Mrs. Bennet puts it, "people do not die of little trifling colds" (Austen 32). The stakes in *Pride and Prejudice* remain comparatively low, since Jane is never in any danger, contrary to Anjey. This is why Austen's novel can remain a light-hearted romance. Although Aliza's brush with danger horrifies her family, her love interest Daired and his friends are impressed with her kill, which establishes her as someone capable of doing what has to be done and, to Daired, perhaps even of moving up in the world. In White's world it is the skill of killing Tekari that truly distinguishes someone, contrary to the accomplishments laid out in *Pride and Prejudice* by Mr. Darcy and Caroline Bingley (Austen 39).

Lastly, Leyda does not risk her reputation and financial stability by eloping. Instead, she is put into physical danger by Wydrick when he breaks her leg in an attempt to use her as bait to draw out the Greater Lindworm (White 331)**.** Leyda is saved by Daired in the nick of time and it is implied that Daired kills Wydrick to punish him (White 331). This plot point does not only reflect on Leyda, but also on Daired: unlike Mr. Darcy, Daired does not step into a family affair that is of little consequence to him aside from upsetting the woman he is in love

with. Instead, Daired saves Leyda from being sacrificed by a man who he knows is violent and remorseless. Once again, it is the threat of death that drives the character's actions.

A second, related theme in the novel is family. This theme is important for the YA genre, since the target audience is still dependent on family to take care of them and the formation of identity in young people is often influenced by how their family sees them. The importance of family relationships is ingrained in every plot point of *Heartstone*. The Bentaine family is close-knit; Robart and Moira love each other and so do their daughters. When they almost lose Leyda, they bond together and comfort each other as well as they can (White 282-3) and when she is returned to them, their bond is stronger than ever (White 285). White presents her readers with families that are based in love. She does this not only through the strong love between Robart and Moira Bentaine, but also through the brief appearance of Aliza's aunt and uncle, who married for love despite Aliza's grandmother's protests (White 232).

Gwyn and Curdred, contrary to Charlotte and Mr. Collins, also develop romantic love between them. In Austen's novel, Charlotte is driven to marriage out of practical concerns. Charlotte is confident about her choice to marry Mr. Collins despite not liking him and shows no regret for it later. Instead, Elizabeth must admit that "it was all done very well" (Austen 155). Charlotte's following pregnancy is only briefly commented on (Austen 343). The marriage between Gwyn and Curdred is formed from a similar need on Gwyn's side: she is looking for a wealthy husband who can pay off her father's debts. She marries Curdred as soon as the opportunity presents itself, despite stating that she would never have done so if she had seen another way to protect her family (White 156). Aliza does not scorn Gwyn as Elizabeth does Charlotte: protecting one's family comes before anything else in White's novel. Surprisingly, Gwyn and Curdred develop a romantic connection after they are married. When Aliza visits Gwyn, she realises that Gwyn and Curdred care for each other and are both truly

happy about Gwyn's pregnancy (White 188). Aliza admits that "there were worse things in the world than well-dressed men with a habit of overemphasizing" (White 179). In White's world, this is certainly true and the stakes of the world put relationships into a new perspective.

8. Conclusion

Whereas Austen focuses on the interactions of a single family with their society to reflect broadly on said society, White uses Aliza's romance with Daired to anchor an overarching speculative plotline. To summarise, both authors focus on the heroine's strength and agency and show the possibilities present within their worlds: Elizabeth can marry a rich man for love and Aliza can save the world with her loving husband. These feats make the respective ethical stakes of the novels visible and are directly linked to their genre. In *Pride and Prejudice,* sense and self-worth win out over pride and prejudice. In *Heartstone*, courage saves the world. This last theme, especially when exhibited by a young, female protagonist, is typical of the YA genre. This is why *Heartstone*, despite not being listed as YA by White, is fit for analysis as a YA novel. White's novel moves beyond a personal story and instead provides a text that encourages young readers to have faith in their capabilities and courage to confront the dangers that they are faced with. After all, the young adults of our generation are tasked with saving the world as well, albeit not from supernatural creatures but from crises such as climate change. In the next chapter, I examine Alexa Donne's *Brightly Burning*, which focuses on empowering a young protagonist to develop into a brave adult who fights for what is right.

Chapter 3: *Brightly Burning* by Alexa Donne

1. Introduction

Alexa Donne published her novel *Brightly Burning* in 2018. This YA novel aimed at teens is described on her website as one of her two separate "YA sci-fi romance retellings of classics set in space" ("Alexa Donne"). Out of my three case studies, this is the most explicit identification of a novel as a YA speculative retelling. However, as with the other two case studies, the YA genre is not explicitly mentioned on the book's own webpage. Instead it is referred to as a "lush and enthralling reimagining of the classic *Jane Eyre*" ("Brightly Burning"). Donne engages with *Jane Eyre's* status as a literary classic: it is part of her selling point that she did not merely write a YA sci-fi novel, but one that builds on the legacy of Charlotte Brontë's well-established novel. In doing so, she becomes part of a broader discussion about the value of YA fiction and retellings. To start my analysis, I will first provide a summary of *Brightly Burning*:

After Earth suffered another Ice Age, humanity has moved onto spaceships that orbit the planet until it will be liveable again. Protagonist Stella Ainsley has lived on the *Stalwart* since she was ten years old. This ship grows most of the fleet's food and houses only the lower agricultural class of society. Stella manages to escape the poor conditions of the ship by transferring to a private vessel as a teacher. There, she meets Hugo Fairfax, the nineteen-year-old captain and owner of the spaceship. Despite the class difference between them, they fall in love with each other and eventually get engaged. However, Hugo has a terrible secret: at the behest of the government, his parents artificially created the illness that wiped out a large part of the poor population a few years ago. Soon after, his mother suffered a psychic break and murdered his father. She has been secretly living on the ship ever since to avoid persecution. Hugo tells Stella the government blackmailed him into having one of his employees create a new strain of the virus by threatening to execute his mother. This new strain will target and kill

countless of the poorest people on the fleet. Stella cannot live with this and leaves Hugo to try and save as many people as she can. However, she finds out that Hugo lied to her: he was unaware that his employee, Mari Hanada, was creating another strain. He found out after Hanada had already handed it over to the government. To prevent the truth about the virus from coming out, the government charges both Stella and Hugo with treason. Hugo is exiled to Earth and Stella follows him there. She finds that Earth is inhabitable again and together they start their new life there.

In this chapter I analyse Donne's interactions with adaptation theory and YA fiction by investigating the novels' narration, style, characters, fabula, genre conventions and themes.

2. Narration

Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is an autobiography written ten years after the events that take place, written in 38 chapters. Contrarily, Donne's novel consists of the main text and an epilogue which relay events as they are happening to protagonist Stella Ainsley, Donne's version of Jane Eyre. Both novels use a character-bound narrator (Bal 22). *Burning Brightly* is written from the first-person perspective of its protagonist, Stella. Similarly to White, Donne employs sentences written in italics to relay Stella's direct thoughts. For example, she writes: "*Dammit, that's my protein ration for the day wasted*" (her italics, Donne 7). Stella is unable to explain the behaviour of other characters and because of this the reader is also left in the dark about their motives and thoughts. Donne entices the reader with these unanswered questions and uses Stella's singular perspective to reveal information at a slower pace. *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, is written by Jane Eyre ten years after the events of the novel take place. Brontë also uses the first-person perspective in her narration. The narrator describes the thoughts and conversation Jane had at that time. For example, Brontë writes: "[t]hen my own thoughts worried me. What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?" (209). Jane asks herself this question in her mind and the narrator relays it

directly. By doing so, it allows the reader to forget that the narrator already knows all of the answers to Jane's questions. Brontë alternates this technique by explicitly reminding the reader that the narrator has all of the information. For example, she writes: "I was able to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm; which, had they found me unprepared, I should probably have even unequal to maintain, even externally" (Brontë 161). In this line, Brontë entices her reader by hinting at an event that she is about to describe.

Stella's perspective is shaped by her past experiences. She is a seventeen-year-old who has lived on two separate space ships, followed by a third, the *Rochester*, during the course of the novel. The differences between the ships are used to guide the reader's understanding of the world and the characters. For example, Stella is used to paper books being extremely valuable on the first ship she lived on and unobtainable on the second ship. When she sees them being freely perused on the *Rochester*, this establishes the ship's owner as incredibly rich and also showcases his appreciation for literature (Donne 93). Since Stella is fond of literature as well, her observation encourages the audience to look upon Hugo favourably. The reader is invited to identify with Stella and share her opinions in the unfamiliar sci-fi society that Donne presents. As with *Heartstone*, any partiality in the narration can be attributed to Stella's personal biases. However, Stella is not as obviously biased as characters such as Croggon's Anna and White's Aliza or even Brontë's Jane. She makes an effort to remain rational throughout the narrative by not making assumptions based on the information she has. For example, when a fire breaks out in Hugo's room, as a direct parallel to the fire Bertha sets in Mr. Rochester's room in *Jane Eyre*, she does not jump to conclusions on how it started. Stella muses:

> Hanada was odd, but if their weekly poker game was anything to go by, Hugo and she were friends. Xiao, Orion, and Jessa were out of the question — too motherly, too friendly, and too young, respectively. I didn't know Lieutenant

> Poole well, but it was a big leap to brand her a killer. And Albert could have simply poisoned Hugo if he wanted (Donne 153).

Stella takes a rational approach to the mystery and does not immediately accuse Lieutenant Poole, who shares a name with Brontë's Grace Poole, the character who receives the brunt of Jane's accusations for the violence at the Rochester estate.

Unlike Stella, Jane has the opportunity to choose what she relays in her story, since she is writing the events down a decade after they occurred. However, like Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights,* Jane attempts to convince the reader that she is being truthful and as unbiased as she can be. She declares: "I am not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth" (Brontë 110). Unlike Nelly, Jane is afraid her honesty diminishes the literary value of the story she is telling and she apologises for this (Brontë 111). Her care for honesty is a rhetorical technique that makes her perspective acceptable as truth to the reader. Moreover, like Anna, Jane invokes the fallibility of memory as an excuse for any narrative inconsistencies. Brontë writes: "[Bessie, Jane's nurse] was pretty, too, if my recollections of her face and person are correct" (31). In this passage, Jane simultaneously establishes that she is relying on her memory to supply her with details and admits that her biases may influence her perception of people. Since she cares for Bessie, her remembered beauty may be emotionally motivated.

Both Stella and Jane present themselves as trustworthy narrators, despite the fact that they are subject to personal biases. Since they relay their own life stories, they both have reason to present themselves more favourably to the reader. However, Brontë's narrator Jane has more opportunity to be deceitful, since Jane explicitly states that she is writing the text that the reader is writing, whereas Stella is unaware that she is the narrator of a text. She has no motivation to be untruthful, since she is unaware that her thoughts and experiences are being relayed to a reader.

3. Style

With regards to style, *Brightly* Burning falls in line with my other two case studies. The Penguin Popular Classics edition of *Jane Eyre*, published in 1994, is 447 pages long and is printed in a small font with small margins. *Brightly Burning,* on the other hand, is printed in a slightly larger font, consists of larger margins and has 393 pages in total. Donne's writing style consists of short sentences that mainly describe Stella's actions and sensations. For example, when Stella first meets Hugo, Donne writes: "My suit was like lead, weighing my limbs and slowing my steps. I grabbed him by both arms and dragged him to the door. It took all of fifteen, twenty seconds but felt like five minutes, me drag-shuffling him, throwing my left shoulder against the hatch button, waiting for it to open" (84). Brontë, on the other hand, describes Jane's experience through the typical 19th-century trailing sentences. In her corresponding scene, she writes: "I put down my muff on the stile, and went up to the tall steed; I endeavoured to catch the bridle, but it was a spirited thing, and would not let me come near its head; I made effort on effort, though in vain: meantime I was mortally afraid of its tramping forefeet" (Brontë 116). The style of the two novels is affected by the narration: Jane is speaking from memory, whereas Stella is relaying a current event.

The tone of the novels is affected by the knowledge of the narrators. Brontë's narrator knows the details of everything that is happening to her younger self. Because of her knowledge, she is able to foreshadow events such as Mr. Rochester's secret coming out (Brontë 161), which adds tension to her narration. Donne's narrator, on the other hand, is constantly trying to piece together information. For example, she eavesdrops on a conversation and attempts to access a restricted area on the spaceship to learn why it is restricted (Donne 213-4). She also does not hesitate to interrogate Hugo when she has questions (Donne 211). Brontë's Jane is also concerned with other people's behaviour and watches them closely. However, although Jane is often curious about what she sees, she rarely asks questions and

does not press for answers when they are not given to her (Brontë 215). The fact that both protagonists are curious and investigative women makes sense, since both novels have a secret at the core. However, *Brightly Burning* plays into the mystery more than *Jane Eyre* does by foregoing any foreshadowing.

Donne's tone is also more ominous: as with the other YA novels, the stakes in *Brightly Burning* are higher than they are in the original text. Life in space is perilous and this puts the characters of the novel in danger on several occasions. The dangers in *Jane Eyre* mainly stem from the actions of one particular character, Bertha, who attacks Mr. Rochester and Mason respectively. Hugo and Stella are also attacked by Donne's version of Bertha, Hugo's mother, but these instances are set apart from the other times when they are in mortal danger, because they are not related to the ominous setting of space, but to an interpersonal conflict and mystery. Donne also expands on a danger that plays a minor role in Brontë's novel: that of the government. Jane and Mr. Rochester only face the law when it prevents them from getting married and, since a crime was not committed in the end, they do not suffer any consequences from their interaction with the law. Stella, on the other hand, is branded an outlaw and actively pursued by the government for her part in revealing the government's role in the spread of the Kebbler virus and its new strain. She is hunted down with the aim of imprisonment and execution, although ultimately she manages to escape this fate. Jane, on the other hand, peacefully lives with the Rivers family during this time. Stella is at a higher risk than Jane is and this danger is communicated through the tone. Combined with the writing style, the tone of *Brightly Burning* creates more tension than is present in *Jane Eyre*. This is in line with my other two case studies.

4. Characters

A comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Brightly Burning* reveals a change in characterisation: the female characters are given more agency and relatability. The protagonist is put in charge

of saving the day and the female character who is regarded negatively in the original gets more relatability and depth in the retelling. Additionally, the love interest of the novel is adapted to suit the culture of a modern Western audience more fully. These changes are similar to the changes made in my other two case studies and thus reveal a broader pattern with regards to characterisation. I will now discuss the three characters who exemplify this pattern the most: Stella Ainsley, Hugo Fairfax and Bianca Ingram.

Like White's Aliza, Donne's Stella is presented to the reader as a skilled young woman. She is a respected teacher and mechanic and the *Stalwart*, where she lives and works, is sorry to see her go when she accepts a job offer from the *Rochester* (Donne 44). This puts Stella in a more renowned position than Jane, because Stella's skills explicitly make her valuable to the story world. Jane is presented as unexceptional and can leave Lowood without any issue (Brontë 91). Although both women seek out and take up a similar opportunity to become a private teacher, this change holds more weight for Stella. Jane is able to stay on at Lowood as a teacher for as long as she likes and chooses to leave to pursue adventure within the limits put upon her by her class. Stella, on the other hand, is aware that the government is planning to send the *Stalwart* to Earth soon, since it is showing irreversible mechanical deterioration. Moving away from the spaceship not only offers her an opportunity for self-improvement and adventure, but also provides her a safer home.

Stella's departure from the *Stalwart* also highlights her relationships on the ship. Contrary to Jane, whose only true friend, Helen Burns, died in childhood, Stella has a living best friend, George. They are both orphans who moved to the *Stalwart* at the same time and have a strong bond. Stella has been in love with George for many years, but this romantic affection is unrequited. Jane develops a friendship with Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper of Thornfield Hall, but this relationships remains at the polite distance that is expected in 19th century society. The presence of a close friend such as George, as well as Stella's romantic

feelings for him at age seventeen, make her more relatable to a young audience. Despite the dystopian world she lives in, Stella is dealing with some of the same subjects that contemporary teenagers are: spending time with her friends and hoping that a boy will fall in love with her.

Whereas Jane is serious and wise for her age, Stella is a common teenager. She is a representation of the teenage experience as we know it today, displaced to a story world that is different from the real world. Similarly to the protagonists of the other two YA case studies, Stella feels like an outsider. She muses that "[s]ometimes the loneliest you could be was surrounded by people who didn't understand you" (Donne 55) and is happy to find a place where she feels accepted aboard the *Rochester* (Donne 120). Jane is equally happy to find her equal in Mr. Rochester, but she is initially looking for a change of environment rather than a home. Jane's lack of personal connections and the limitations put upon her by being part of the working class also establish her as an outsider. Furthermore, Jane has thoughts and opinions that are presented as uncommon for women of her age and class. She wants to "seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils" (Brontë 86) and settles for being a governess because it is the only safe way for her to leave Lowood (Brontë 87). Her true longing is for freedom and adventure (Brontë 86). Stella, on the other hand, is a child looking for a home and a family. Stella's longing for a place to belong distinguishes her from Jane and characterises her as a YA protagonist. Although many children long for adventure, Jane's desires are characterised as part of her transition into adulthood instead of part of her adolescent experience. Since Jane is a young woman in 19th century Great Britain, she is regarded as an adult woman at her young age of around nineteen. This is not the case for Stella, who is perceived as a child by the adults who work with her on the *Rochester*, which becomes evident when she and Hugo get engaged. One of her few colleagues, Officer Xiao, states: "[Hugo's] only nineteen, and she's not even eighteen" (Donne 273). Stella is not yet expected to be an adult.

Both Stella and Jane accept marriage proposals from their respective partners, despite the fact that these unions are unheard of in their hierarchical societies. However, the reason for their subsequent break-ups are different. Jane ends the engagement because she realises it would not be legally binding, since Mr. Rochester is already married to another woman (Brontë 312). Stella, on the other hand, faces an ethical quandary: staying with him would mean condoning the spread of the deadly virus that will target the lower class. Instead, she leaves him and attempts to distribute a vaccine and save as many as she can (Donne 294). Stella's responsibility goes beyond her personal life. She has the power to save lives and reveal the government's corruption and she chooses to do so despite her fears. This aspect of her character resonates with the research of Wilkins and Coats, who both identify a resistance to oppressive power structures in speculative YA texts (Wilkins 25, Coats 150).

Stella's young age shows when the government almost catches her, which would lead to her execution. Stella is horrified and nearly faints, declaring: "I should be strong. Defiant. I would go bravely to my death" (Donne 351) before bursting into tears, to which one of her friends exclaims "[s]he's only a child" (Donne 351). However, Garcia notes that it is her age that makes Stella suitable as a hero, stating that "[y]oung protagonists are often the saviours of fantasy societies precisely because they are young and bring new energy or ideas to the resistance" (21). Donne explicitly engages with the burden of growing up as well as a young protagonist's potential to change the world and uses her speculative setting to highlight these themes through Stella. This will be further discussed in the sections on genre conventions and themes.

Stella's love interest Hugo Fairfax is also different from Brontë's original character in various ways. Hugo is the nineteen-year-old captain of the *Rochester* and Donne's parallel to Mr. Rochester. He is the guardian of his younger sister Jessa, Donne's parallel to Brontë's Adèle. Hugo is more handsome than Mr. Rochester and therefore a more typical love interest.

Donne describes Hugo as having "strong features you might call handsome" (85), although he is "severe-looking" (93) and his facial features make him look judgemental (93). Mr. Rochester, on the other hand, is not considered handsome by Jane at all (Brontë 132). Unlike Mr. Rochester, Hugo is only two years older than Stella and still a young adult himself. Although he is Stella's employer, his age affects the power difference between them. Mr. Rochester's position as an experienced adult as well as Jane's employer places most of the power in the relationship with him. Hugo, on the other hand, is in the same stage of life as Stella, which makes them more equal. This makes Hugo a more attractive love interest for a modern audience, who struggle to support a relationship with an age difference of more than fifteen years such as in *Jane Eyre,* especially considering Jane is still an adolescent.

Hugo's behaviour is in line with his age. He is not fully aware of his privileges as part of the rich and powerful, since he has never ventured outside of his social circle. He only interacts with other rich people and the few people under his employ who live with him on his ship. Stella notes: "I got the sense Hugo was used to getting exactly what he wanted, all the time" (Donne 114). In this, he is similar to Mr. Rochester. Although Mr. Rochester has suffered greatly during his life, as the owner of the Rochester wealth and estate he is now in a position of power where the people around him cannot and do not question him. Hugo's family owns one of the five largest and richest spaceships in the fleet, the *Lady Liberty.* Since Hugo's parents died years before the events of the novel, the *Lady Liberty* belongs to him and his sister. This not only gives them financial power, but also ensures that they have a role in the government of the fleet. Nevertheless, Jessa is a minor, so this power resides with Hugo. Stella points out that Hugo "actually got to vote on essential measures" (Donne 118) as the owner of the *Lady Liberty*. This is a departure from Mr. Rochester's character, who holds no political power that we know of. Hugo has a casual attitude to his power and wealth. For example, the *Rochester* houses the most extensive digital archive of what used to be the Internet on his spaceship. When

he allows Stella access into this library, he "shrugged, like he'd just given [her] a handkerchief" (Donne 126). Although Hugo is aware of his responsibility as a powerful player in the fleet, he is oblivious to the extent of power this position gives him. Hugo is also prone to acting childish. For example, he attempts to make Stella jealous by getting close to another girl, Bianca. He explains: "I was confused. And, um, I sort of wanted to make you jealous. See if you liked me as much as I liked you" (Donne 268). The tone of this confession as well as his reasoning reads as teenage behaviour expected from an adolescent. Mr. Rochester does something similar when he parades Blanche Ingram in front of Jane and treats her as his prospective fiancée, with the express wish to "render [Jane] as madly in love with [him] as [he] was with [her]" (Brontë 261). Brontë relates this to Mr. Rochester's eccentricity instead of his age and states that he has "a curious, designing mind" (261). Whereas Hugo's behaviour is presented as childish, Mr. Rochester's corresponding actions are deemed manipulative, although they are not held against him by Jane or the narrator.

Hugo is sometimes oblivious to the power difference between Stella and himself as well. For example, he hacks her drawing tablet to print her artwork (Donne 258) and uses his power as her employer to call for her when she is avoiding him (Donne 266). However, Hugo also treats Stella as an equal: he explicitly states he does not own her and Stella knows she does not owe him anything (Donne 261). During their love confession, Stella agrees to marry Hugo when he confirms that she is his equal (Donne 272). His respect for her as an individual emphasises the feminist message of the novel: Stella is no less than Hugo and he is only lovable because he agrees with that fact. Similarly, Mr. Rochester considers Jane his equal and this makes him suitable as a love interest for her. Like Stella, Jane cares deeply about being considered an equal. She is of the opinion that: "though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him"

(Brontë 174). This is a particularly feminist message for a 19th century novel and allows Donne to adapt the novel without straying from this original message.

Hugo is also attractive as a love interest because of his deep emotional attachment to Jessa and his mother. He tells Stella that his decision to give the virus to the government is motivated by them threatening his mother's life (Donne 288). Mr. Rochester has no such close relationships, barring Adèle, who he only takes care of "on the Roman Catholic principle of expiating numerous sins, great or small, by one good work" (Brontë 141) rather than because he holds any sincere affection for the child. The only person Mr. Rochester is attached to is Jane and he is dependent on her to the point of toxicity. When Jane makes up her mind to leave him, he threatens her with violence, although he calms down as soon as he sees Jane will not tolerate that (Brontë 300). Hugo, on the other hand, shows kindness and love to other characters, such as his sister and mother. Furthermore, it is revealed that Hugo was unaware that the virus had been handed over to the government by a member of his staff (Donne 321). Donne presents him not only as a loving son, but also as blameless for the crime against humanity that took place on his spaceship.

The last highlighted character is Bianca Ingram, Donne's parallel to Blanche Ingram. Initially, Bianca fulfils the same role in Donne's novel as Blanche does in Brontë's work: she is the love interest's upper-class would-be fiancée who contrasts Stella and makes her insecure. Contrary to Stella, Bianca does not act authentically and attempts to win Hugo over by "playing the part of the coquette and simpleton" (Donne 220). Similarly, Brontë's Blanche attempts to impress Mr. Rochester whenever she can with the intention of marrying him (Brontë 185). Blanche, however, is not playing a part: according to Jane, she holds no opinions of her own and has no assets other than her beauty (Brontë 185). This distinguishes her from Bianca, whose behaviour is more calculated. Both Bianca and Blanche want to marry to gain more wealth. However, Bianca has more pressing concerns than Blanche does: her spaceship is deteriorating

and only a good marriage will save her family from having to go down to Earth (Donne 177). This adds depth to her character and shines a more positive light on her motives. Nevertheless, Bianca is antagonistic for the majority of the novel. It is only towards the end that she is shown in a positive light: once Bianca and her family are taken in by the *Lady Liberty*, she no longer sees Stella as a threat and treats her kindly. She explains that she loves Hugo like a brother and provides her old spaceship to bring Stella down to Earth (Donne 343-4). Donne shows that there is more to girls than what can be seen on the surface and shows the possibility of friendship in unexpected places, underlining this with a hug between the two girls (Donne 345). Blanche is Jane's foil, but Bianca is merely a girl attempting to protect herself and her family in a dangerous world and is thus similar to Stella. This added character complexity can be found throughout my case studies and emphasises YA's tendency to create and highlight round female characters.

5. Fabula

The climax of the fabula in *Jane Eyre* focuses on Mr. Rochester's secret wife, Bertha. In Donne's novel, however, the secret that separates Stella and Hugo is not the fact that his supposedly dead mother is secretly living on the ship. Instead, the big reveal is that Hugo's father created the deadly Kebbler virus that killed 30% of the population of the *Stalwart*. Moreover, one of Hugo's staff has produced another, even deadlier virus that will be used to kill much more of the working class. Throughout the novel, Donne establishes that the Kebbler virus is a lasting mental trauma for lower-class workers and that many of the victims were children. The Kebbler virus initially represents how unsustainable it is to remain on the spaceships long-term. It is Donne's way of bringing the reader's attention to the dangers of this speculative world: resources are running out and tragedies occur, putting humanity at risk. However, the Kebbler virus is only a memory. It is not until it is revealed that a new strain has been created that the danger becomes imminent. All of Stella's friends on the *Stalwart*, along

with the children she taught there and countless other innocents, are put at risk. As in *Heartstone*, the climactic event in *Burning Brightly* is a catastrophe that affects far more people than just the main characters.

Because the stakes have been raised, Stella's following actions affect far more people than just herself and Hugo. Whereas Jane runs away and becomes a village teacher, finding a family in the Rivers, Stella informs the people of the government's plan to attack the lower class to the best of her ability and distributes vaccines to her loved ones. Jane suffers on her way to the Rivers family, but is safe as soon as she gets to them. Stella, on the other hand, is arrested and almost executed before escaping with her life thanks to the help of her friends. During this part of the novel, Jane's main concerns are her relationship with Mr. Rochester and building a new home for herself. Stella, on the other hand, becomes an outlaw and flees to Earth's surface, despite the fact that it may still be uninhabitable. Once more, the stakes of the speculative novel are far higher than that of the realistic novel it is inspired by and the young female protagonist is empowered and given the ability to change the world.

Donne creates a hopeful ending, in line with the findings of Michael Cart (125). Stella and Hugo are able to live together happily on Earth. Moreover, Stella is able to limit the effects of the virus and lend power to the people who want all of the spaceships to return to Earth, extracting a promise from the new owner of one of the largest ships on the fleet that the entire ship will come to Earth within the decade (Donne 393). Aptly, the novel ends on a hopeful sunset, "one of thousands to come" (Donne 393) and Stella declaring: "I knew I was home. At last" (Donne 393). Although Jane is allowed a similarly happy ending with her husband regaining his sight and seeing their children (Brontë 446), Stella not only creates her own happy future, but provides one for countless other people, with a distinct YA flair.

6. Genre

Cart writes that "[s]cience fiction found a welcoming home in young adult fiction" (20) and such is the case for Donne's novel. *Brightly Burning* is the only case study in this thesis that explores the science fiction aspect of the broader speculative fiction genre. Contrary to Croggon and White, Donne transports the story of Jane Eyre to a futuristic world that exists centuries after the events in *Jane Eyre*. Donne even references 19th century literature in her novel, describing how Stella enjoys reading Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (76). *Brightly Burning* being a science fiction novel also affects the way it engages with YA speculative fiction as a whole. The novel incorporates several of the aspects of YA as defined by Garcia: Stella is a protagonist who feels disconnected from the world she lives in and has a love interest in Hugo. The "giant, globe-threatening villain" (Garcia 23) is a group of government officials who are planning to commit genocide. However, she does not have any special powers, which is an aspect that does not appear in Donne's world at all. Garcia notes that YA novels often romanticise and essentialise the working class (60). Donne fills the *Stalwart* with innocent children, hardworking folk and revolutionaries, delivering a positive but simplistic portrait of the working class and in doing so follows this trend in YA literature. According to Garcia, the unique story worlds in science fiction allows readers to gain a clearer view of their own worlds and existence (xvi). I would argue that this effect is not limited to science fiction but can be applied to speculative fiction as a whole. The worlds presented by Croggon, White and Donne inspire comparisons to the world the readers reside in and, as a result, encourages critical reflection.

Kim Wilkins mainly discusses fantasy fiction, but provides some insights on the YA genre in general that are useful for looking at *Brightly Burning*. She identifies the typical "headstrong heroine" (Wilkins 19) of YA literature, who exemplifies that "women, especially young women, have strength, skill, and stamina enough to save the world" (Wilkins 19). The

examples she uses are Katniss Everdeen and Tris Prior: both are protagonists of dystopian science fiction novels, which suggests that these heroines are especially common in YA science fiction. Michael Cart defines dystopian literature as "usually set in future, often post-apocalyptic societies marked by nightmarish repression, ruin, corruption, squalor, darkness, or devolution to a woeful, preindustrial agrarian society" (123). *Brightly Burning* matches this description: humanity went to space after the Earth suffered another ice age and the treatment of the working class is abysmal. Stella fits the description of the typical heroine of a YA dystopia as described by Wilkins: at seventeen, she confronts the corrupt government and saves countless lives by revealing the truth about the man-made virus that is being used to kill off the lower classes.

Stella's decision to fight against the government is related to another aspect of YA identified by Wilkins: in YA, self-discovery is a dangerous process, tied to the matter of life and death (20). Stella's decision to leave Hugo and attempt to prevent the government's genocide is an instance of self-discovery. It is a defining moment where Stella chooses what type of adult she wants to become. Whereas Hugo decides to hide from the truth, Stella chooses to face it head-on, deciding that "[m]y happiness couldn't come at the expense of lives" (Donne 292). To Stella, this represents the moment that she becomes an adult. She fears the decisions she will have to make now that she has the knowledge about the virus and the power to save a small group of people with the vaccines she has taken with her. She realises that "[a]dults had to make terrible decisions with no good outcomes, all the responsibility falling on their shoulders. And the blame" (Donne 311). Similarly to White and Croggon's novels, Donne's novel explores the transition of adolescence into adulthood by tying it to the high stakes of a speculative fiction novel.

Jane Eyre defies genre conventions with its mixture of realistic fiction and Gothic fiction. In her work "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*", literary scholar

Robyn R. Warhol describes how Brontë tells two stories in two separate genres at the same time: "[t]he heroines are living a Gothic romance, and the narrators are telling a realist tale" (864). This is an apt way to describe the intermingling of Gothic conventions such as the gloomy castle and the monstrous woman living in the attic with the matter-of-fact explanations that the narrator provides. For example, when Jane is a child she regards a light outside of the Reed household as a herald of a ghost. Narrator Jane, however, adds: "I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern carried by some one across the lawn" (Brontë 19). Heroine Jane is experiencing horror, but narrator Jane is ready to disperse the Gothic mood. This is not the case for *Brightly Burning,* where the narrator coincides with the protagonist more smoothly.

Meanwhile, scholar Katie Kapurch approaches *Jane Eyre* as a melodrama in her study "'Unconditionally and Irrevocably': Theorizing the Melodramatic Impulse in Young Adult Literature through the *Twilight Saga* and *Jane Eyre*". Kapurch points out that melodramatic conventions are common in 19th century fiction and are now also popular in YA literature. Kapurch recognises melodramatic conventions such as "occasions of exaggerated suffering prior to a joyful reunion" (164) and passionate interior feelings in the protagonist and love interest (165). I find similar melodramatic impulses in Donne's text: for example, Stella experiences "[a] flame of desire, which I tamped down but feared I could not extinguish, now that it had been lit" (Donne 120) and later "horror gripping my heart" (Donne 291). The parallel Kapurch draws between the melodrama in *Jane Eyre* and YA literature may account for why Brontë's novel is chosen for a YA retelling.

Donne interacts with speculative fiction characteristics in her worldbuilding. She creates a high-stakes story world where a person's safety is linked to the home they live in: humanity resides in spaceships and if those spaceships fail, they will die. This threat is emphasised during Stella and Hugo's first meeting, when Hugo nearly dies because of an issue

with an oxygen tank (Donne 83). The ships need constant maintenance from engineers. The dangers stem from the fact that the fleet has remained in orbit for longer than was intended. Its inhabitants are on high alert at all times, especially in the poorer ships where it is nearly impossible to receive new materials to replace the old ones. This awareness creates an underlying tone of danger in Donne's novel, in a similar way that Croggon and White use the fear of wizards or monstrous creatures to establish the high stakes of their speculative novels.

A second way Donne engages with the speculative fiction genre in her novel is through an object called Rori. Rori is an artificial intelligence system that runs the *Rochester*'s computer systems and is controlled by its owner, Hugo. However, Rori is not a run-of-the-mill A.I.. Instead, Donne assigns it a distinct personality and a modicum of free will. On top of that, Donne also assigns Rori a gender: it is referred to with she/her pronouns. On several occasions, Rori ignores protocol to make things easier for Stella (Donne 84, 139). Because she is a machine made to follow protocols, her dismissal of protocol establishes her as something beyond just a computer system. Rori also makes adjustments to commands, such as "taking it upon herself to only half raise [the blinds], leaving the room moody but not too dim" (Donne 143) when Stella asks her to provide light. Hugo points out that Rori's relationship with Stella is out of the ordinary, since Rori usually checks all commands she receives with Hugo before following them (Donne 99). More than a machine, Rori is a character in Donne's novel. She has a name, a gender, her own opinions and, most importantly, personal relationships with other characters. Rori can also be connected to what I identify as the main theme of *Brightly Burning*: finding a home. Rori adds depth to Stella's appreciation of the *Rochester* by personifying Donne's version of Thornfield into a person-like entity that Stella develops a personal relationship with. Rori's unique status between human and machine was a definitive departure from consensus reality when the novel was published in 2018, thus classifying her

as a speculative aspect of Donne's novel. Arguably, this is no longer the case in 2023, since A.I. technology has developed rapidly in the last few years.

Donne adapts the Gothic novel *Jane Eyre* into a speculative fiction novel that uses spaceships and A.I. to comment on broader YA themes such as the transition into adulthood the potential for changing the world that adolescents possess. She expands on the subversive aspects of Brontë's novel to create a message that suits the modern audience. This is in line with my analyses of the other two case studies.

7. Themes

The central theme in Donne's novel is the young protagonist's search for a permanent home. This concept of home is connected to love and family and contrasts the loneliness that Stella experiences. As of the start of the novel, Stella only has a faint idea of what home truly feels like. Contrary to Jane, Stella remembers her parents, who died when she was a child. She thinks of them fondly and associates them with a type of happiness that she has not experienced since (Donne 32). When her parents die, Stella is displaced: she loses her family and her home at the same time. Afterwards, finding a home is her main goal. She briefly thinks her friend George may be able to provide this home, but in the same breath notes that he cannot, since he does not reciprocate her romantic feelings (Donne 47). As discussed in the character section, Stella feels like an outsider on the *Stalwart*. Her struggle with fitting in and finding her own place in the world are typical of the teenage experience, which is central to YA fiction.

Hugo is the first person who makes Stella feel understood and who notices her loneliness (Donne 119). Stella's relationship with Hugo allows her to feel at home for the first time since her parents' death. When she is falling in love with Hugo, she is reminded of the love and happiness she experienced with her parents, although she also notices "a hint of something else, not familial at all. A flame of desire" (Donne 120). As her feelings develop, Stella briefly leaves the *Rochester*. Upon returning, she notices that she is "happy to be home"

(Donne 129). Already, her concept of the *Rochester* as home is solidifying in her mind. This feeling expands when she starts a relationship with Hugo. Stella has a little experience with romantic love because of her feelings for George, but Hugo is the first person to show her reciprocated love. Nevertheless, Stella's happiness does not stem only from having a partner. As a teenager, she is still searching for a family. Being with Hugo, to Stella, means being a part of his family, including his staff and his younger sister. Despite the fact that Stella is already close to Hugo's loved ones, it is only when she accepts his marriage proposal that Stella feels like she will become part of the family (Donne 274). The novel resolves with Stella finding the home she has been looking for since she was a child. She declares: "[t]he house Hugo, Jessa and I shared stood at my back … and I knew I was home. At last" (Donne 393). These final lines emphasise that the central theme of the novel is Stella's quest for a place where she is accepted and loved.

8. Conclusion

Brightly Burning, like *Jane Eyre*, follows a young woman's discovery of self and of home. However, whereas Brontë's novel focuses on the complicated power relationship between its heroine and its dark hero, Donne's novel centres Stella's moral responsibilities towards the disempowered and marginalised communities of her world. This focus is typical for speculative fiction and highlights YA's general theme of self-discovery and transitioning from a child into an adult. Donne explicitly connects Stella's knowledge of the new virus and her relationship with Hugo to her youthful courage to disrupt and reject existing social and political structures. In doing so, Donne adapts Brontë's progressive and romantic protagonist into a young hero who saves humanity by advocating for social equality for marginalised communities.

Conclusion

One of YA literature's most attractive and popular traits is its variation. Despite YA's reputation as a genre of spunky dystopian heroines and instant romantic attraction, there is a YA text for everyone. The genre encompasses every sub-genre one can think of and every year hundreds of new titles are published. It is impossible to capture the nuances of the genre = in a simple definition, and this has not been my aim. However, looking at YA novels that are part of a specific subset, as I have done in my thesis, reveals a similarity of themes that can be found across the genre. The recurrence of these themes is corroborated by various scholars with whose thought I have engaged for my research. These scholars make a distinction between fantasy, science fiction, and YA fiction as a whole. However, the conventions they point to can be found across these genres and are present in all of my case studies.

Various patterns light up in my analysis of the three novels by Croggon, White and Donne, and my comparison of them to their original texts. The tone of the story shifts in the adaptations, adding tension and violence to the stories as they broaden their scope from private to global issues. The characters of the YA adaptations impact the wider world with their actions. They are part of a political landscape where they gain power through their relationships with other characters. The protagonists discover who they are and who they will become, growing from unhappy children into adults with a purpose. They are outsiders who find a home. Minor female characters are given more depth and relatability, representing today's tendency to criticise the roles that have been assigned to women throughout history.

In my three case studies, I have signalled a continuous focus on the sense of moral responsibility that adults encourage in teenagers as they transition into adulthood. The young protagonists of the novels live in worlds where the adults have either failed or found to be morally corrupt. The youngsters, who are full of kindness, empathy and courage, step up to lead their society to safety. The danger of their speculative worlds forces them to grow up and

reveals the tendency of YA novels to let its young protagonists not only face but also overcome dangerous challenges. As I have argued, this process is not easy: the young characters in these novels experience fear, insecurity and loneliness as they develop their growing awareness of what adulthood and personhood entails. This trajectory includes factors such as social class and gender, which inform the characters' positions and opportunities in the world they grow up in. The disempowered become the empowered and lead the world to greener pastures. Teenage experiences such as first love, self-discovery and engaging with politics for the first time are connected to the high stakes of speculative worlds where danger lives around every corner. This danger forces the protagonists to face questions and themes that are not at all speculative: who am I, what do I stand for, what am I willing to sacrifice? The speculative worlds may seem distant, but they are closely connected to the real world of real teenagers. Consequently the speculative aspect offers readers a distance from which to reflect on ungraspable experiences in their real lives. Notably, all my three case studies point out an undercurrent of hope throughout the stories which is featured heavily in their endings. Not only do the protagonists, or in Lina's case her daughter, find a home, they face and stand for a brighter future that has been facilitated by their actions. By standing up for what they believe in and challenging existing social and political structures, these young adults have been able to change the course of history.

By comparing these YA speculative retellings to the realistic adult texts they were based on, this thesis reveals the aspects of the classic novels that are deemed not only appropriate for a younger audience but also a fitting space for the exploration of teenhood and personhood in our present age and culture. The love stories of the 19th century that were chosen by contemporary authors to adapt for young adults are subversive in their own right and lend a stage to extended narratives about subverting existing social and political structures, an endeavour that is commonly associated with adolescence. This link between subversion and

adolescence is supported by YA texts foregrounding adolescents' potential for affecting change. YA novels are a tool for adults to address teenagers and communicate a message to them. This message, as confirmed by my case studies, focuses on moral responsibility and hope: if you use your bright young energy to stand up for what is right and connect with other people, you will be able to find happiness, as well as lead the world to a better age. The young adults that are described in and addressed by YA novels represent a generation full of potential to change not only fictional worlds, but the real world as well.

Historically, YA literature, speculative fiction and adaptations have been regarded as lower forms of art that are less compatible with academic research than their realistic adult literature counterparts. Nevertheless, by neglecting to investigate them, academia overlooks a vast corpus of literary works, as well as the significance of the audience that these works are addressed to. Regardless of the age of the reader of a YA novel, the text is directly addressing adolescents. In a world that is facing threats such as climate change, this group of young people is increasingly important for the future of our world. By showing young adults worlds that are in crisis and representing them as the courageous, kind heroes able to save these worlds, they can be encouraged to act upon their potential. This encouragement and belief in adolescents is fundamental to the YA genre and can be identified as the core theme of the texts that I have investigated in this thesis. Any definition of the YA genre, I contend, should therefore include an acknowledgement of the genre's capacity for representing the potential of young adults as well as encouraging their sense of moral responsibility.

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